

SENSATIONAL
FRENCH NOVELS

THE
THUMB STROKE
AND
PRETTY BABIOLE



F. DU BOISGOBEY.





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THE THUMB STROKE

AND

PRETTY BABIOLE.

DU BOISGOBEY'S SENSATIONAL NOVELS.

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DU BOISGOBEY'S SENSATIONAL NOVELS.

THE THUMB STROKE

AND

PRETTY BABIOLE.

By FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY.

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THE THUMB STROKE.

I.

THE omnibus from the Madeleine to the Bastille was rolling heavily along the boulevards, and "casting clouds of dust on its obscure anathematisers," as poor Arnal said in "Renaudin de Caen"—a vaudeville of thirty years ago. In plain language the heat was intolerable, and as the omnibus was quite full, those who ran panting after it all in vain, were loud in their abuse of the company's monopoly. Deceived in their hopes, these aspirants to cheap locomotion did not even receive the sympathy of the more fortunate persons in the vehicle. On the contrary, they were openly laughed at, especially if they were women, for under the burning sun men were unwilling to get on the top, where they alone have the privilege of sitting. The company assembled inside the omnibus afforded a pretty complete specimen of the different classes of Parisian society. It is well known that the occupants of omnibuses vary according to the routes traversed. There are aristocratic lines, such as those in the quarter of the Madeleine and the Champs Elysées, magisterial lines as those near the Law Courts and the Chamber of Commerce; neutral lines—half grave, half gay—where grisettes armed for conquest rub shoulders with respectable matrons; such as the Odéon line which, starting from Batignolles, the abode of small freeholders, follows the noisy street of Notre Dame de Lorette, and passing the noble Faubourg St. Germain, ends in the gay and easy-going Latin quarter. Again, there are the thoroughly plebeian lines between Ménilmontant and Montparnasse, which carry workmen in blouses and Mesdames Angots of the Rue Mouffetard to the Halles.

The line of the Boulevards comprises all these varieties; fashionable when it starts from the Madeleine, it becomes middle-class further on, and is wholly given over to artizans at the end. Silks, on this line, never pass the Château d'Eau.

On the day on which this story opens, which was one of the last days of June in the last year of the last Empire, the omnibus No. 119 of line E contained three honest tradeswomen, four grisettes out for a holiday, two third-rate actresses, an artizan, three gentlemen of a more or less fashionable type, and one whose social position it was not difficult to guess.

This last was an old man clad in a long black robe, somewhat worn, and wearing a broad-brimmed hat, black woollen stockings, and heavy shoes with silver buckles. He was a tall thin man, slightly bent with age. His eyes were constantly lowered, and his lips moved as though he were

muttering a prayer—thick red lips they were, and full of good nature when he smiled.

This gentleman, so different from his fellow-passengers, was seated to the right of the conductor's step. His next neighbour was a young man attired from head to foot in a check suit of large pattern, and wearing a light rose-coloured necktie—the costume and graces of a draper's assistant out on leave. Opposite to him was a workman—the only one in the omnibus—firmly seated, with his large fists clenched, and his arms akimbo. From the further end of the vehicle, where the ladies were in a majority, proceeded a chorus of exclamations, accompanied by smothered laughter. This gaiety was provoked by the proceedings of the draper's assistant. The amiable youth was grasping the iron bar above his head firmly with one hand, and with the other was making signs at his neighbour, imitating the gestures of the lazzaroni of Naples, when warding off the evil eye. The young ladies evidently understood this pantomime, for it kept them in a continuous state of laughter.

The old gentleman raised his head, but not guessing the cause of the mirth, he resumed his modest and pensive attitude. This, however, was not at all what the young practical joker wanted, so to advance matters he said to his neighbour—

“Tell me, sir, are you going far like this?”

The old man, astonished, looked at him and replied—“I am going to the Place de la Bastille, sir. May I ask——”

“Why I put the question? It is not difficult to understand. It was because it is somewhat tiring for me to keep my arm continually raised.”

“If I am in your way, sir, I will try to sit closer.”

“No, no, it's not worth while; you are not in my way at all, especially as you are so thin as only to take up half a place.”

“Well then, sir, I do not quite see.”

“What! you don't see that I am grasping the bar, because one must touch iron after touching a priest?”

The old man blushed, but only turned away his head and resumed his prayer. Encouraged by the resignation of his victim the smart youth seized the bar with his other hand, and so roughly that he struck the old man's hat and nearly knocked it off.

No one had the courage to take the part of the priest excepting the workman who sat opposite to him. When the omnibus started, he had also made his examination, and on recognising the ecclesiastical costume it was not exactly a sentiment of sympathy which displayed itself on his honest countenance, but the moment these vulgar jokes commenced the worthy fellow frowned and began to beat time with the carpenter's rule which he held, an evident sign of impatience, and something more. To tell the truth this movement of the rule disturbed the good priest's tormenter a little, and whilst hurling forth his fine sarcasms he could not restrain his eyes from following it. But he took confidence in the thought that the workman must belong to the Faubourg St. Antoine where but little love exists for those who wear a dress “that recalls the superstitions of another age.” He had read this high-sounding phrase that very morning at the restaurant where he dined, and he was only waiting for an opportunity of introducing it so as to excite the admiration of his audience to the highest point. Unfortunately he was mistaken in his calculations, and he had no sooner touched the old priest's hat than the dreaded ruler was raised and this threatening movement accompanied by words as energetic.

"What are you about you young blockhead insulting a poor old man who has done you no harm ! But that is enough ! Look out for this rule if you begin again."

The dandy would willingly have replied by an insult, but, like Panurge, he had a natural dread of a blow, and so kept silence. He even let go the bar which he affected to hold as a preservative against the contact of a priest.

There may have been others in the omnibus who shared this ridiculous prejudice against the clergy, but the intervention of the workman accomplished wonders. The grisettes ceased laughing and the tradeswoman cast angry glances at the ill-bred joker, who, feeling himself no longer supported, quietly quitted the vehicle.

They had reached the short ascent of the Boulevard Saint-Martin and the driver had put the horses into a walk.

"Stop, please," cried a woman running towards the omnibus and dragging a child after her."

"There is only one place, mother," said the conductor.

She let go the handrail of the omnibus which she had already grasped, and cried with an air of dismay, "Oh dear me, I shall never catch the train to Nogent."

"Yes, yes, the next one," growled the facetious conductor.

The poor woman who was no longer young seemed worn out with fatigue, and the child who had been lost by the fall looked ill and could hardly walk.

"Is there any room on the top?" asked the old man.

"As much as you like, sir."

"Then stop, please. I will get up there, and you'll have two places for this good woman."

The conductor then opened the bell and called to the woman, who ran up and stiff to the priest. "Thank you, kind sir. You are doing me a great service. Ah, if you only knew, perhaps you are saving a man's life."

"Get in, get in, mother; you can talk at the end of the journey," said the conductor, pushing her into the omnibus. "All right above, there?" he added, looking to see if the good-natured priest had accomplished his ascent. "All right! go on."

Public opinion is just as variable in omnibuses as at political clubs, and that of omnibus No. 119 unanimously changed in favour of the old man who had just given up his seat.

"To think that but for this good man the poor woman would have been left in the street," murmured one gossip to her neighbour.

"And she would have missed her train, for the next one starts at five minutes after six, and you may be sure she has not the money to take a cab," replied the other.

"That's true; she doesn't look as if she were made of money."

"Your boy is not very strong, mother," said the workman.

"Ah, don't speak of him," replied the good woman. "I think I shall ever get him home."

"Is he your own child?"

"On my word, no! He is a foundling that I've been to fetch from the asylum, but if I had known they would have given me such a weak little lad I should never have asked for one."

"Well, in truth, he doesn't look strong."

"What could you expect? His father and mother probably didn't have a dinner every day."

"And what are you going to do with the poor little chap?"

"Oh, I don't know. I thought he would help us in the garden, but it seems as if he would rather need our help."

"It was a queer idea of yours, all the same, to take an orphan from the hospital."

"It wasn't my idea. I must tell you, sir, that Pierre and I have no children. Pierre is my husband. But we have a market garden of our own, and we need a lad to water the vegetables and help in digging, and it is not easy to find a lad in the country—they all come to Paris. Well, then, Pierre, who can read, saw in the paper that there were children to be had at the hospital, and no sooner seen than done. 'Jacqueline,' said he, 'go off to Paris and choose a lad.'"

"And is this the one you chose?"

"Ah, I did not choose him, sir; it was the clerk who beguiled me by saying that this boy was not like the others; that he was sickly just now, but that he would soon get over it if we took care of him, and that he was the cleverest and best in the place."

"Well, well, mother, it is not children that are wanting in my house; I've three of them. But what will your husband say when he sees the boy?"

"He! It's easy to see you don't know him. He'll begin by grumbling, and he'll tell me we've no need of a useless mouth to fill. But he isn't the man to send the poor lad away. No, no; he'll say, 'Jacqueline, we wanted a worker and we've got an invalid instead. We'll keep him, all the same, and take care of him. Perhaps he may repay us some day.'"

"Your husband's a good fellow, mother. May I ask his name?"

"Pierre Ledoux, gardener at Charly-sous-Bois."

"Charly-sous-Bois; that is on the Marne, is it not?"

"Yes, good sir; you might say a suburb of Nogent. You take the train to Vincennes, leave Joinville on the right, and then——"

"Good, I know it; I go in that direction sometimes of a Sunday with my wife and children."

"And would it be inquisitive to ask your name?"

"Antoine Cornier, mother, and much at your service if you have business in the Faubourg."

"Have you a business there?"

"I'm a cabinetmaker in the Rue de Charonne."

"That's a better business than digging the ground, I fancy."

"It's not a bad trade, mother; but work is very slack. One works like a slave one week, then on a sudden orders cease, and nothing is doing for a month or two. Ah, I would prefer to dig like your husband."

This discussion on the comparative advantages of a rural life and a workman's life in town might have lasted a long time, for the two speakers were fond of talking, but the omnibus had reached the Place de la Bastille, and the conductor called out—"Change for the Barrière Fontainebleau, Charanton, Bercy, Le Trône!"

"Let us hope the train has not started," cried the peasant woman, jumping on the pavement.

"Good-bye, mother," said the workman, "and a pleasant journey to you."

"Thank's, good sir," replied Jacqueline Ledoux. "Come, Marcel," she added, holding out her hand to the foundling.

Whilst she was getting out the old priest descended with difficulty from the top of the vehicle. Nothing is forgotten so soon as a service rendered

by a stranger, and the countrywoman did not even look at the excellent man to whom she was indebted for not being left behind. He, on the other hand, examined her with good-natured curiosity, and directed his looks especially to the child, this poor sickly little creature, who could hardly stand on his feet, and neither spoke nor smiled. It was indeed piteous to see this lad of twelve with the frame of a child of six or seven, and a thin wasted face, that told of consumption. A philosopher would have cursed the corruption of the large towns which casts upon the world these wretched creatures, destined to misery and early death.

The peasant woman, not noticing the boy's extreme fatigue, hustled about and dragged him after her. She was in a hurry, for the station clock stood at a few minutes before six. The workman went off toward the Faubourg Saint Antoine, but the priest was going to the station, without doubt, for he followed Jacqueline.

They had to cross the Place de la Bastille—a vast esplanade traversed in all directions by large and small vehicles. There were omnibuses going at full speed, and between them glided cabs and private carriages, like fishing boats in the midst of a fleet of men-of-war.

The good woman did not seem very much at home in the art of crossing the Parisian streets, for it is an art, and an art that none but old Parisians possess. You can tell a provincial twenty yards off by his awkward manner of avoiding the vehicles. The boy was certainly a great hindrance, for he stumbled at every step. However, they reached the pavement which surrounds the Column of July in safety, and the woman took advantage of the halt to recover breath. But she saw the inexorable clock, which was just about to strike six, and, spurred on by the fear of losing the train, she set off running again. Unfortunately she did not take her eyes off the clock, and was thus unware of a carriage turning out of the Rue Saint Antoine at full trot. It was a magnificent landau, drawn by two superb bays. They were right upon Jacqueline Ledoux before she saw them.

"Look out! Look out there!" cried the coachman, pulling the reins.

The good woman lost her head, made one step forward, and then turned and let go the child's hand. The poor little fellow, not being supported, stumbled and fell just in front of the horses, which the coachman could not stop. One second more and he would have been under their hoofs. The woman, terrified, dared not move, and the passers-by who saw the accident from a distance could only utter cries of dismay. But the old priest, who was crossing the Place behind the peasant woman, rushed to the horses' heads at the risk of being knocked down himself. The violence of his effort at first caused him to lose his footing, but he had the presence of mind not to let go the reins, and by clinging to them he succeeded in regaining his feet. Then by a violent pull of the bit he turned the carriage aside. The wheels grazed the head of the child, but did not harm him, and the coachman quickly recovered his power over the horses, and succeeded in pulling up, loudly abusing the priest for daring to touch his animals. The old man took the child up in his arms, and then arose a general tumult and universal confusion. The woman, recovering from her fright, cried more loudly than all the others, and the crowd, coming together from all corners of the Place, completely surrounded both the victim and the authors of the accident. Then appeared the uniform of the police, but the workman reached the old man before them. "Bravo!" said he, holding out his hand, "I knew by your face you were a brave man, and I am uncommonly glad I settled that blockhead in the omnibus."

"Thank you," replied the priest, "but help me to carry this dear child, for I think the good woman has lost her head a little."

"What is the matter?" asked a police sergeant, who had at last succeeded in making his way through the crowd.

Of course twenty persons replied at once with twenty different versions of the affair. Whilst the sergeant was endeavouring to obtain a clear account of what had occurred, some policemen approached the carriage to make enquiries in that quarter also. The only occupant of the landau was a man of about fifty, tall and broad shouldered, with enormous red whiskers surrounding a sallow face. He was elegantly dressed in a suit of English make, and wore a small round hat, presenting the appearance of a perfect country gentleman.

"What do you want with me, and why do you take the liberty of stopping my horses?" he asked the policeman curtly.

"Sir, your coachman has just knocked down a child."

"I am sorry for that, but I am in a great hurry, and should be obliged by your making way for my carriage."

"Not until you have given me your name and address."

"My name and address! What business are they of yours?"

"It is necessary I should have them. The mother of the child may want compensation, and one must know where you are to be found."

"Compensation! Absurd! I saw perfectly well how it all happened. The stupid woman threw herself before the horses. She is quite in the wrong."

"Sir," said the sergeant, coming to the help of his subordinate, "It is not my business to decide that; but I must insist on having your name and address, otherwise I shall be obliged to conduct both you and your carriage to the police station."

"Enough! Here is my card," said the gentleman impertinently, and he drew out an elegant card-case adorned with wonderfully elaborate armorial bearings.

The sergeant took the card and read the name, "Wilfrid Wassmann, 44 Rue de Strasbourg," and turning his back on the red-whiskered gentleman, said, "Good; you will be written to."

The coachman was only waiting for a signal from his master to drive on, when the peasant woman, approaching the carriage, called out—"There's no need to ask the good gentleman where he lives. I know him well. It's he who has taken the Pavillon des Sorbiers, alongside of Monsieur de Chambré's château, and my husband supplies him with vegetables and with flowers for his daughter."

The sergeant pushed the good woman gently back, thinking her talk would not interest Monsieur Wassmann, but to his great surprise the latter at once changed his manner, and said almost graciously to Jacqueline—

"Then you live at Charly-sous-Bois?"

"Yes, yes; I have lived there more than thirty years. I'm the wife of Pierre Ledoux, the gardener."

"Your house is at the end of the village, close to the tavern?"

"Yes, the Chalet du Grand-Vainqueur, kept by Mademoiselle Rose,—you know where I mean?"

"I think, indeed, I have seen you there," said the gentleman, looking at her curiously. "Are you the mother of the child that fell down in front of my horses?"

"No, my good sir, he's a foundling that I have taken from the hospital, to make a young gardener of him."

"Very good," said M. Wassmann, more graciously than ever. "The accident has certainly frightened you, but you have to be compensated. The child will perhaps need medical attention. Are you going back to Charly?"

"I've lost the train," sighed the woman, looking sadly at the clock: "but I hope to get home in time for supper."

"Very well. My carriage will take me there in less than an hour. You'll hear from me this evening, my good woman. Go on, Fantz!" he cried to the coachman.

"He is not so bad as he looks," murmured the peasant woman.

"But yes, we know where to find him if he doesn't keep his word," said the sergeant.

This authoritative assurance calmed the wrath of the bystanders, who began to disperse according to the custom of all crowds among whom one always finds sympathy for the oppressed and hatred of the oppressor. The majority moved quickly off as soon as the oppressor has disappeared, and when all that remains to be done is to assist some poor devil or other, just as the crowd looking at a street urchin disperses the moment the poor wretch sends round the hat.

Thus it happened that in a very few moments the child, the priest, the peasant woman, and the sergeant were the only persons left in the middle of the Place. The boy looked up with longing eyes from a severe fright.

"It's nothing, my good lady," said the child: "I'll come back to the station."

"Thanks, good sir; but it is hardly worth while, since the train has started."

"I don't be distressed at that, neither," said the sergeant: "there's another in an hour. Come home with me in the meantime and rest a bit, and have a morsel to eat."

"You're very good, but——"

"But what?"

"It would take too long to tell, but I have my reasons for wishing to get back as soon as possible, on account of my cousin Michel, the gamekeeper of the Count de Brannes."

"Ah! do you cook his dinner for him, then?" asked the workman, laughing.

"No, it's not that; but only because! This morning, as I was coming on my horse to go to the station, the postman brought me a letter, and that's a thing that doesn't happen twice a year, for I don't read. Well, as my husband was not there I put the letter in my pocket, and at Paris it occurred to me to ask the clerk at the post-office if it were mine. He read it aloud, and it appeared to come from one who called himself Yves Michel, that it's intended to kill him to-night as he goes his rounds in the *trou de la Bellère*, which is a dangerous place, and a good deal of business. I must certainly run cold, and you can understand that I am anxious to get back to Charly as soon as possible to save our poor Michel."

"That's a queer story," exclaimed the workman. "What, murder a man! If that sort of thing happens often at Charly I don't go there to spend my fortune after I have made it."

"Oh, perhaps it's only some shameful practical joke," said the old priest. "Why should they kill this gamekeeper, who is doubtless a worthy fellow?"

"That he is, sir," replied Jacqueline Ledoux. "He served in the

Zouaves, and has a pension and a medal and all. Still, for all that, there are many persons in the country who don't like him because he has to have them up for poaching."

"And who is it that tells you they are going to kill him to-night?" asked Antoine Cormier.

"Ah, as to that I can't say. The clerk told me the letter was not signed. It's an anon—ano——"

"An anonymous letter. Good! Some practical joke to give you a fright. Listen, mother. They won't kill your Michel as long as it's daylight, and if you leave by the seven o'clock train you'll have plenty of time to warn him before nightfall. You've forty minutes to spare before the train starts, and it won't cost you much to give me and my wife the pleasure of a visit: besides which my little ones will be pleased to play for a time with your little lad."

"I don't say no, but——"

"Come, come; I see what it is. You country folk are always afraid of putting yourselves under an obligation. Well, come and see us and we'll return your visit. One of these Sundays we'll come and ask you for a glass of milk from your cow and some of your cherries."

"Ah, well," said Jacqueline, "if you promise to come and have a bite with us at Charly I will go. And then to-night, when I get back, I'll leave the lad in the house.—Mamzelle Rose will look after him if my man is not at home,—and then I'll make off to warn our poor Michel."

"That's all right, mother; so come along to the Rue de Charonne; it's only a few steps off. I hope your reverence will come too."

"Well," said the old man, "I am like this good lady; I've lost the train; for I was also going by the railway to Nogent. So I will not refuse, especially as this poor child has much need of attention."

"We'll attend to him, never fear: but we shall be very glad to see your reverence."

As the house in which Antoine Cormier lived was almost at the corner of the Faubourg they reached it very quickly. It was one of those immense buildings that abound in this industrious quarter. One entered it by a long passage leading to a courtyard filled with piles of red coloured wood cut from the heart of a gigantic tree grown on the banks of the Amazon.

Round this central court there rose high walls pierced by numerous windows. On all sides one heard snatches of songs, joyful cries, the noise of hammers, the grating of saws. It resembled the activity, the restlessness, the noise of a hive of bees.

"You've no stairs to tire you, your reverence, we live on the ground floor," said Cormier, pointing to his workshop at the end of the courtyard.

Then he led his guests in between wardrobes and chests of drawers to a room where three children were playing round a woman who was busy darning stockings.

"Louise!" he said "I have brought you some company." His wife seemed a little astonished but she put down her work and came to welcome her guests.

"I met this lady in the omnibus as she was on her way to Charly sous Bois with the boy. He fell in crossing the Place de la Bastille, and would have been crushed by a carriage but for his reverence, who dragged him from under the horse's feet."

"Oh! poor little fellow, how pale he is," said the workman's wife. "It was very good of you sir to go to his assistance," she added to the old priest.

"Come, Louise, my dear," said Cormier, "keep your compliments for by and bye, and give the little lad some black currant-juice, taking us too the bottle of brandied cherries."

"Sit down, Mother Leboy—and your reverence also; here is a chair holding out its arms to you—there is no want of furniture here, for I make it."

The artisan's wife was still young and had a sweet good-natured expression. Her three children had given over their game. One clinging to his mother's dress followed her about wherever she went. Another was seated on his father's knee, as usual, and acted as a soldier on duty. The third, a little girl, was entreating the little boy from the hospital with curiosity.

"Excuse me, your reverence," said Cormier, but may I make so bold as to ask you to what parish you belong. It is not in order that I may go there, for I am not particularly devout, but I should be glad to see you again."

"I am not one of the clergy of Paris," replied the old man, "I have been lately called to a small charge near Nogent-sur-Maine, and I was just going there when——"

"Whereabouts is it, your reverence?" interrupted Jacqueline.

"I have been appointed to the parish of Charly-sous-Bois."

"What! you are to replace our old cure who died last month!"

"Yes, my good lady, and after what I have heard, I suppose I have made the acquaintance of some of my parishioners."

"Yes, sir, that is so. I introduced to Pierre Ledoux the gardener who lives at the end of the village."

"I shall have much pleasure in making his acquaintance."

"And he'll be glad to see you, sir, although——" The pleasant woman paused, and one did not need to be over sharp to guess the reason of her silence.

"Yes, yes," said the old priest smiling, "I know that Pierre Ledoux is one of the most honest men in the parish but that he doesn't often go to church."

"What! you know that? then you won't come to see us?"

"Why not? on the contrary I intend to visit you oftener than any of my other parishioners."

"Ah! I'm glad of that, sir. After what you have done for this child, I could never be happy if I saw no more of you."

"Will your reverence drink a glass with us?" said Cormier.

"With all my heart, but first let us look after our invalid."

The workman's wife was already on her knees before the child, warming his poor little hands in hers, and making him swallow a mouthful of syrup.

"How old are you, my little man?" she asked him.

"Twelve, madam," replied the child.

"And have you been ill long?"

"Oh, yes. For many years I could not get out of bed. But I'm stronger now."

"Are you glad you are going into the country with this lady?"

"Oh yes!"

"But you don't know how to dig the ground?"

"Last year I learned to dig a little; but it tired me too much, so the hospital gardener showed me how to water the flowers, and how to prune the rose trees. I can do that, and I like doing it."

"Hum! That's unfortunate," said Jacqueline, "for my husband grows more melons than roses; however, the child can at first occupy himself with our flower garden."

"And you may be sure the pure country air will soon restore him to health," added Louise. "How are you now, my little friend?"

"Much better, madam, and I thank you very much for all your goodness," said the child, raising his large black eyes, full of sweetness and intelligence, to the workman's wife.

"Here's to your reverence's health," cried Antoine, raising his glass, "and before we part please tell us your name."

"My name is easy to remember. I am called Jean."

"But that's your Christian name only."

"I have no other, my friend. I also am a foundling. You see I had my reasons for aiding this dear boy," said the old man with a kindly smile.

"But," he added, drawing a large old-fashioned watch from his cassock, "I think it is time for us to be going to the station."

"Yes, yes, let us be off," cried Mother Leroux. "I don't want to miss another train in case something should happen to Michel. Besides, the gentleman of the Pavillon des Sorbiers said I should hear from him this evening. If it should enter into his head to come and see the child, I must be there to receive him."

"The carriage gentleman! Oh, well. He'll only do his duty if he brings some money for the child that he so nearly killed," said Cormier.

"I don't like his looks at all, that gentleman!"

"Is he a foreigner?" asked M. Jean.

"Yes, a German, a 'square head,' as they say, and there are many folks in the country who don't like him over much. For all that he has a daughter as lovely as an angel and as good. She always has a piece of silver for the poor; and then, how she loves flowers! My husband says he sells her more than thirty francs worth a week. They say her father does not make her very happy, and that Monsieur Henri, the son of the Count de Bismes, is madly in love with her; and my cousin Michel, who hates the German, tells me that his master, the count, won't hear of any such marriage. But that's all gossip, and no one has any business to meddle with what concerns the gentleman of the Sorbiers alone."

"A quarter to seven, my dear lady," said the good curé, with the view of putting an end to this flow of gossip.

"Ah! my goodness! make haste. Come Marcel," cried the peasant woman. "It seems that at the hospital they called him Marcel. What a name!"

As the good woman seemed about to recommence her chatter, M. Jean, in order to stop it, held out his hand to Antoine Cormier, who shook it cordially. Louise tenderly embraced the child; and at last they separated, promising each other soon to meet again. This time they were successful in catching the train, and a little before eight o'clock M. Jean, Jacqueline, and Marcel arrived safely at Charly-sous-Bois, hoping to pass a quiet evening after all the worries and troubles of the day.

God alone orders the events of this world, and none of the three knew what was in store for them that night.

II.

CHARLY-SOUS-BOIS—you won't find it in the map—is not a town, but neither is it a village. It is a collection of villas, châteaux, farms, factories, and cottages, all mingled together and cast, as it were, by chance in a

fresh green valley opening out on the right bank of the Marne. It comprises every variety of country, horses, and of country talk. There is even the wall to the manor, where in summer of a whole army of children, forenoon and afternoon; then the school children, playing the part of the country school children, and having had to sell out a or individual goods for twenty years of his life; then again there is the Parisian city, the owner of a beautiful villa in the present Italian style, where he comes to spend the summer, and from his vices and the love of old land ornaments. Again, one finds there the small landed proprietor, who, as he had been a farmer in the same district, and had left him with a good deal to live in ill-health; he had no greater delight than to do the work of his father with his own hands, and meaning to make, thinking, no doubt, that his ancestors worked for centuries on the land, so that he might be able to take his ease.

Again, there is the real lord of the manor—well born, rich, and well bred, passing the winter in Paris and the summer in an old-fashioned chateau built in the reign of Louis XVI., and restored under Charles X. Such was the count de Launay, the noble owner of the park and forest of Charenton-le-Pont, and the gardeners, and so called by gardeners, and so called by the people. Lastly, there is the peasant, the tiller of the soil; and in this class there are many grades, from the ploughman and the harrowman to the well-to-do farmer who cultivates his own land together with that of others, and the industrious market-gardener who turns his early fruit and vegetables into good Parisian gold.

Among these was Pierre Beloux, the peep-hole's husband, a man from his feet and stem in his opinion, but in his opinion, those of his neighbours, of course, and of his own, and hard on himself, as it must be concluded, he was allowed to others. Everything had to go like clock-work in his establishment, and no one was allowed to interfere in his affairs. For all that, he was an excellent fellow, eating well and drinking better, and talking loudly at the Café Grand-Vauqueneur, which was the rendezvous of all the gossips of the neighbourhood.

M. Jean, the new cure of Charenton-le-Pont, had only been a week in charge of the spiritual welfare of his flock—a task not always very easy to direct. To fill a benefice in the noisy suburbs of Paris is a very different thing from guiding a quiet country parish. At Charenton M. Jean found that he was placed in the position of a missionary sent to convert the heathen in some island in the Pacific, and it was not without good reason that his ecclesiastical superiors determined to place him there. Originally a founding, as he had told Madame Lenoir, M. Jean owed his education to an old priest in Normandy who died over him, one morning under an apple-tree. This priest was a learned man, and what was better, a good-hearted man. He put the child out to nurse at a noble breeding farm, and as soon as he was old enough undertook personally to teach and direct him. The pupil proved an honour to his master, entered the seminary, where he had a brilliant career, and on leaving it was attached to the curé of Versailles, where he quickly became curate, and priest, and where he remained three years, and his good learning soon won him distinction. He remained there thirty years. Though he might well have died at any time, he had no power in the church, he was not a favour to his diocese, and he was not a good clergyman, and he did so much good in his parish that no bishop thought of removing him. This was only accomplished by a fire which destroyed the parsonage in which he had passed half his life.

At the time this accident occurred M. Jean was sixty years old and his health already very feeble, suffered greatly from the efforts he had made to extinguish the fire.

The village doctor declared that rest and change of air were indispensable to him. In these circumstances the Bishop of Versailles recommended M. Jean to the Archbishop of Paris for the vacant charge of Charly-sous-Bois, where the air was excellent, and the flock of sheep had great need of a good shepherd.

Charly was indeed anything but noted for its sanctity, and the Christian virtues, the enlightened zeal, the bright intelligence, and the inexhaustible charity of M. Jean were by no means too great for the task of bringing back to the fold the lost sheep of this charming village.

The worthy priest accepted this new task bravely, although it was not without regret that he left a neighbourhood which he had made his own, and the honest country folk who had become a real family to him. Poor and full of faith, like the first Apostles, M. Jean took nothing away with him but his breviary and his well worn cassock, and his entrance into Charly-sous-Bois caused far less commotion than the daily walks and drives of M. Wassmann, the wealthy lessee of the Pavillon des Sorbiers.

The first days were taken up by the numerous details incidental to settling in a new house, and the curé had not yet had any time to make the acquaintance of his parishioners. His lucky meeting with Jacqueline, and rescuing the poor child were therefore, so to say, his *début* in the village, and on getting out of the train at five minutes past seven, the good curé thanked God for giving him an opportunity of commencing his new life by so propitious an act.

The house of mother Ledoux was a considerable distance from the parsonage, which was situated at the other end of the village, so the travellers separated at the station. M. Jean embraced the child and promised Jacqueline that he would call and see her on the morrow, and then bade the good woman good bye, but not without having first offered to carry a message from her to the gamekeeper Michel. The château of M. de Brannes was on the road to the parsonage so it would have been easy for the curé to have taken the message himself, but Jacqueline protested that she would not give him the trouble; she said she would first take the child home, and be with her cousin within half an hour afterwards. M. Jean thought that like a prudent housewife she did not wish to miss the promised visit, and above all the gratuity anticipated from the rich stranger, and as he did not attach great importance to the anonymous warning, he left Madame Ledoux to manage matters in her own way.

By crossing the village he could reach the parsonage in ten minutes, but he preferred to take the schoolboy's road, that is to say, to follow the banks of the Marne.

The day had been very hot and he wished to have a good breath of pure air and enjoy the freshness of the evening and the river before going home.

He had ordered his old servant Genevieve to prepare his frugal supper at nine o'clock, so he had plenty of time to make the round and he followed the shady pathway on the right bank of the Marne.

The night was falling, and the stars were shining out one by one. The only sounds to be heard were the rustling of the willows, the distant song of a nightingale, and now and then in the reeds the movements of an otter seeking its hole.

In spite of his sixty years, M. Jean felt deeply the beauties of Nature, and he fully appreciated all the poetry of this calm, sweet landscape. The

parish which he had left had none of this charm, and M. Jean thanked God for having sent him to Charly-sous-Bois.

Further on the road became wilder, hemmed in as it was by the steep bank of the Marne on one side, and on the other by a wooded height. Soon the cure recognised the wall enclosing the park of the Count de Brennes. He had not yet paid a visit to the chateau, but he resolved soon to do so, partly in obedience to the lord of the manor and partly to beg his aid to help him out of his charitable position. Although he had only been in Charly a week, M. Jean had yet had sufficient time to find out the poor. Whilst he was discussing with himself which day he should choose for this duty, a noise of rattling wanches caused him to turn his head quickly towards the wood that bordered the road. It seemed to him that some one was walking cautiously among the trees.

He stopped to listen, but heard nothing more. His thoughts turned instinctively to the gendarmes at Michet, and the uneasiness of Mother Leboucq regarding that good portion of the count's preserves. Then, reassured by the hear, which was hardly one for a murder, by the proximity, moreover, of several houses, and by the profound calm that prevailed around him, he continued his walk. He had not, however, gone a dozen steps when a feeble moan fell on his ear. This time the sound proceeded from the side of the river, and was much more distinct.

The good cure advanced quickly and saw below him on the river's brink a woman seated on the grass. The moon was entering on its last quarter, and had not yet risen, but the sky was so clear that one could see more distinctly than one can in the heart of Paris on a gloomy day. The woman was not alone. She had an infant on her knee, while beside her another child, a little older, was lying on the grass and crying bitterly.

"What is the matter, my good woman?" asked M. Jean.

At the sound of his voice the woman raised her head and replied ill-temperately, "Nothing. Can not one sit down in the open air?"

"You are mistaken if you are thinking I am finding any fault with you," replied the cure gently. "A moment ago I heard a moan, and I thought perhaps you were in want of help."

"I am in want of nothing, and of no one's help."

"But your children?"

"My children need nothing."

"I'm hungry!" cried the one lying on the grass.

"Be quiet," said his mother, shaking him roughly.

"I won't be quiet, I'm too hungry," answered the little boy.

"If you're not quiet I'll tell your father."

This must have been a terrible threat, for the child ceased crying as if by magic.

M. Jean, surprised and touched by this scene, was wondering what to do next, when he suddenly remembered that he had bought two small rolls of rye bread in Paris, and that he still had one of them in the pocket of his cassock. He held it out to the child, who seized it greedily, and bounded to his feet as if afraid that some one would take it from him.

"Mark!" cried the woman, "I forbade you to do that."

But the child, instead of answering, divided the roll into three parts, gave one to his little brother, put the other forcibly into his mother's mouth, and then set to work to devour his own share.

"Sir," said the woman in a mournful voice, "I can't take the bread out of their mouths, but I asked you for nothing."

"I know that, madam, and I am glad it occurred to me that I had the roll, for at least the children will have something to eat. But this is a very frugal meal, and if you will bring them to the parsonage——"

"The parsonage! Then you are the village priest?"

"Yes; and I have therefore a good right to help my parishioners."

"I don't belong to the parish."

"Where do you come from, then?"

"Nowhere," answered the woman bitterly.

"What! you have no home?"

"No. I know that's against the law, and that one hasn't the right to live by chance and sleep under God's sky. Go and fetch the gendarmes if you like. They'll take us to prison, and then——well, they'll have to feed us."

"No, I won't fetch the gendarmes," said the curé smiling; "but though I am neither rich nor powerful I will do my best to help you out of the distressful position to which your misfortunes have reduced you—undeserved misfortunes too, I am sure. One has only to hear you talk to know that you were born in a very different station."

"And suppose I was? What good can my past do me if my children have no other future but to beg in the streets?"

"Why do you despair of the goodness of the Almighty?"

"Because He has abandoned me," said the woman; "because I am no longer worthy of His pity, any more than I am of yours. You would like to know my history. Listen. It is short and simple. It is the history of thousands of unfortunates who like me have yielded to the guidance of their hearts. I was the only daughter of a rich farmer, and I might have lived happily in a place where everyone honoured and loved us. But I left my father to follow a man whom I madly loved. That was fourteen years ago, and for fourteen years not a day has passed that I have not wept for my fault."

"Poor woman, I pity you," murmured M. Jean.

"The man I adored was not content with taking me from my father; he married me, but only to make me suffer all the more. What can I tell you that you do not already guess? My poor father died of grief, and the considerable fortune he left me was squandered by my husband in a very few years."

"And had you not the courage to stop him in this fatal course—the courage to defend your children's patrimony?"

"No; for I loved him, loved him madly—more even than before he had made me his slave. Every time he came to obtain from me a portion of that fortune which should have been sacred to him, I knew he was stealing the patrimony of my children, and cursed my weakness, but I had not the courage to resist; and when I had yielded I vowed to myself that it should be the last time; but he came again, and again I yielded. You see therefore that I am not deserving of pity."

"No, no," said M. Jean, with tears in his eyes; "you do not deserve to be so unhappy, for your faults are faults of the heart. Let those who have never loved cast the first stone at you. But he? He was then very wicked."

"He? Oh, no; he was good. It was pride that ruined him."

"Pride?"

"No; I am mistaken; not pride, for that would keep one from any base action. It was vanity that drove him to the abyss into which he dragged

ne with him. He was handsome, amiable, charming; but he wished to make a show, to be brilliant at any price. He sought me because I was beautiful, because I was rich, because in securing me he triumphed over numerous rivals. He has ruined me by addicting me to a luxury that I detested. He has sacrificed our happiness to . . . But what does all this matter?" said the unhappy mother. "One day he went away, leaving me alone with my children, without any resources, without shelter——"

"And you have never seen him since?"

"Never. He left France after a—a duel in which he killed a man. And now that you have heard my sad story, listen to a confession which will prove to you that I have deserved my fate. If he were to come back and order me to follow him, if he asked me to give him my life, or the bread of my children, I would obey him still."

"Then you still love him?"

"Yes," said the woman with a wild expression.

A long silence then ensued. The good curé, deeply moved, looked at the strange picture before him—the children lying on the grass greedily devouring the bread he had given them, the mother raising her head proudly as if to defy fate. As far as he could judge she was still beautiful. He saw her eyes shining brilliantly in the darkening shadow—black eyes full of fire, eyes that spoke, as it were. She seemed, too, neatly dressed, and carried what was apparently a guitar slung over her shoulder.

"Sir," she said in a calmer voice, "the wandering life I lead is very hard for my poor children, but don't think that I have taught them to beg, or that I beg myself. I sing in the street to earn their bread."

M. Jean made a movement which she perceived.

"Yes, I know," she said bitterly; "it is a base occupation, but I never learned to work with my hands. I was a good musician, and I had a tolerable voice. It was one means of gaining our bread, and I have taken to it. In winter the times are sometimes very hard; but in summer I go to the different fairs near Paris, and the sou's I get are generally sufficient for our wants. By unusual ill-luck I have made nothing at all to-day; it was so hot that there was no one in the streets of Charly, and when it grew cooler I was worn out with fatigue, for I had been walking all day, and so I stopped here. I tried to sing in front of the château up there, but the servants drove me away. Ah! the rich don't like to see poverty near them."

This accusation applied to M. de Brunnes, who was understood to be very charitable, was certainly unjust, and the curé was about to rebuke the poor woman by telling her that one might be very willing to assist the unfortunate and yet not care to encourage the tribe of itinerant vocalists; but he remembered that she was scourged by misfortune, and consequently entitled to some indulgence, and farther, that it was evidently far more necessary to succour her than to preach to her.

"My son," he said gently, "in the name of these dear children I ask you not to refuse what I am going to offer. I know some respectable people in Paris who will find you an honourable and remunerative occupation, and who will put your boys to some trade."

"Would they be happier?" murmured the woman. "Is not the free air and the liberty they enjoy worth more than the labour and restraint of a workshop?"

"Work is the law of the world, and no one has the right to disobey it. Think of your husband, who would not have caused you all this misery if

he had loved and practised work; and you will consent, I am sure, to follow my advice."

This time M. Jean touched the right chord.

"I will do what you wish, sir," said the poor woman, inclining her head.

The curé, rejoiced at finding another good deed to be accomplished, was reflecting how to procure the mother and children a lodging for the night, when the clock in the church tower of Charly began to strike with that slow muffled tone peculiar to village clocks.

"Nine o'clock!" he murmured. "It is later than I thought. Geneviève will be getting impatient."

Just then a report from a gun echoed in the silence of the night. The woman jumped up hastily in a fright, her children pressed close to her, and M. Jean could not help trembling. He thought of the warning Jacqueline Ledoux had received, and wondered if the gun had been fired at Michel. After listening attentively, however, he heard nothing further.

A profound silence succeeded the report, which was dying away after being repeated by echoes in the large wood that bordered the river. Then the only sound heard was the distant song of a party of boating men as they descended the Marne, disturbing the peaceful inhabitants of Charly with their bacchanalian chorus.

The shot had been fired in the wood near the wall of M. de Brumes's park, not more than a hundred paces from M. Jean and the woman and children, but far above their heads, for the wooded slope rose steeply from the roadside. In this direction no sound was to be heard beyond a gentle rustling among the branches of the pine trees planted along the pathway.

"It is only the count's gamekeeper firing at an owl or a weasel to save his master's pleasure," muttered M. Jean, more uneasy than he wished to appear, for Jacqueline's presentiments were in his thoughts.

"Listen!" said the singer suddenly. This time the curé heard very distinctly the crackling of broken branches and dry leaves crushed under foot. Some one was walking cautiously through the wood, and the footsteps rapidly approaching seemed to be taking the direction of the park towards the lower angle of the wood.

"It must be the gamekeeper," said M. Jean in a whisper. "A poacher would never run the risk of following the path by the water's edge. But we shall soon see who it is, for if he does not change his direction he will come out there on our left." And he added to himself, "I shall be glad to meet him so as to give him the caution which perhaps good Mother Ledoux has forgotten to convey to him."

The priest was still speaking when a second shot was heard louder and nearer than the first. It was immediately followed by a piercing cry of agony.

"Ah! Good God!" cried M. Jean, "they've killed him."

"Who? Who?" said the woman, petrified with terror.

"The gamekeeper Michel—the warning was only too true. Ah! the unfortunate woman, why would she take the child home instead of going to the château direct from the train? And it is my fault also. I should have——"

Another feeble cry was heard from the wood. The sound of footsteps at the bottom of the hill had ceased.

"There is a man lying up there," cried the good priest. "I cannot leave him without help."

"I will go with you, sir," said the singer.

"No, no! You can't leave your children, and you must spare them the terrible sight. Stay there with them. I will return when I have seen that it is safe, and then it may be you can go for help to the village whilst I proceed to the château."

And without waiting for a reply, M. Jean, gathering up his long cassock, rushed into the wood with all the air of a young man and the bearing of a soldier. The woman remained on the river's bank pale, trembling, holding one of her children with each hand. The little fellows did not speak. They pressed close to their mother, and looked at her as if to ask what it all meant.

Meanwhile the song of the boatmen drew nearer; but silence was restored in the wood. M. Jean was already far off, and the cries for help had ceased. The rising moon began to show her crescent shape and disc above the high trees, and soon lay full on the path, and sparkled on the waters of the Marne.

"Let us go, mother," said the elder of the boys.

"Be quiet," she muttered, putting her hand on her mouth: "be quiet. Some one is coming."

There was again a sound of crackling branches, but this time with a feeling that announced the approach of some one fleeing in all haste. The light then lit it out at last, it was M. Jean, and she advanced to the outskirts of the wood, but she did not dare to call out.

The man, however, who was approaching had heard her cross the road, and he tried to keep silence, for the sound of footsteps grew fainter and fainter although still approaching.

The poor woman, more and more terrified, stooped down to make her children lie flat on the ground, and trembling with them at the side of the road held her breath. If it was a murderer coming up thus cautiously, she did not wish him to see her. She was reassured by the thought that if this man had really committed a crime, and sought to escape by the river path, he would doubtless turn his back on the village of Charly and the Château de Chassenail. He would of course be anxious to get into the open country as soon as possible.

She had calmed this far in her conjectures, when suddenly a man appeared before her, twenty paces off, at the corner of the park wall. She crouched close to the foot of the tree, holding her children tightly in her arms, and waited.

The man stopped a moment before jumping on to the road, and looked cautiously all round. He was too far off, and the moon did not shine brightly enough for her to distinguish his features, but she saw perfectly well that he was tall and thin, and wore a blouse and a broad-brimmed straw hat. He carried a gun in one hand, and in the other a pheasant that he had just killed. After a moment's hesitation he emerged from the wood, crossed the path rapidly, and descended to the river's brink. There the woman lost sight of him for a moment, but she soon saw him reappear empty-handed, and as she had foreseen he went on in the opposite direction to the village.

He was walking quickly but not running. He had evidently placed his gun and the pheasant in some hiding place, and having thus got rid of all that could create suspicion, and believing that he had not been seen, he fancied himself perfectly safe, and judged it useless to hurry.

His behaviour was not that of a murderer, and the poor woman comforted

herself with the thought that perhaps the priest was mistaken, and that that cry, that dreadful cry, which still echoed in her ears, had been uttered by the gamekeeper when making his round simply to scare away the poacher. She was, however, still so frightened that she dared not move, and resolved to remain concealed in the ditch until M. Jean returned. She would certainly have taken flight could she but have seen what was happening in the wood where all was again silent.

After leaving her, the worthy priest scrambled up the wooded height at hazard. He was at a loss how to direct his course in the darkness, for he had not now the cries to guide him; and he experienced much difficulty in making way at all through the dense brushwood. The thorns tore his face and hands, the moss-covered soil gave way under his feet and all his energy was needed for him to continue scrambling in this thorny labyrinth. But he was sustained by the thought that there was near him an unfortunate being dying for want of aid, about to yield his soul to God without a priest's voice to murmur the words of comfort in his ear.

He soon felt glad that he had persevered, for in about ten minutes he distinctly heard groans near at hand. He redoubled his efforts and at last reached a clear glade in the wood where the moon penetrated through the trees.

In the dim light he saw a man stretched at the foot of a beech tree and hastened up to him. The gloomy forebodings of Jacqueline had been fulfilled. It was indeed Michel lying on the grass in a pool of blood. M. Jean recognised him by his dress and the brass badge he wore, not by his face, for he had never seen him before. The unfortunate gamekeeper had fallen on his back, and the blood was flowing from a wound in the throat. His strength was rapidly failing. When the good curé raised him in his arms and placed him against a tree he opened his eyes and tried to speak, but his voice was gone, and he could not utter a single word distinctly. He threw his arms convulsively about, raised his left hand, and seemed to point to a particular spot in the wood.

"Was the murderer there?" asked M. Jean, "or did he run off in that direction?"

Michel had strength to make a sign in the affirmative. "Think of God, my son," said the priest; "of God who will pardon you as you pardon your enemies." And he began in a low voice to pronounce the absolution, that supreme consolation which the Roman Catholic church affords the dying in the terrible hour when eternity begins.

The poor gamekeeper thanked the priest by a grateful look, and seemed comforted. He breathed more freely, the convulsive trembling that had agitated his whole body ceased, the blood stopped flowing. M. Jean had a moment's hope. He bound the wound with his handkerchief, and held a bottle of smelling salts to the wounded man's nostrils, which revived him a little, and he again tried to speak.

"The man—who—shot—me," he murmured "was the—the——"

"Name him, name him," exclaimed the priest.

"It was the—the p——"

The sentence was not completed and the name of the murderer was lost in a sigh, the final one. Michel was dead, and carried with him the secret of the crime.

M. Jean laid him gently on the moss and began to pray for the soul that had taken flight. The dead man's eyes were open and his mouth, contracted, seemed still trying to pronounce the name of his murderer. His left arm

remained stretched out as if pointing to the road by which the villain had fled. But all was over for Michel. The unfortunate gamekeeper, a victim of his duty, had not the consolation before dying of naming his murderer, and his tragic end would apparently go to swell the list of unpunished crimes which had their origin in poaching.

At Charly, as in other places, the poachers, secretly protected as they were by the country people, were very rarely caught. A peasant who would like to have a thief condemned to the galleys for stealing one of his chickens is always ready to sympathise with these nocturnal sharpshooters.

The good curé of Charly praying for the victim of this cruel assassination had no thought to these social questions. He was wholly absorbed in his grief and his prayers. Nevertheless after invoking the pity of the Almighty, he reminded that human justice had its rights, and that it was his duty to turn the authorities as soon as possible.

The wood in which the murder had been committed was only separated from a wall from the park of M. de Brames, and extended almost to the gate of the château which was erected on the summit of the hill. This gate opened the high road at the entrance to the principal street of Charly, and the murderer must either have been very bold, or felt pretty sure of escaping, to attack the gamekeeper at a distance of a couple of hundred yards from the village.

The simplest thing to do in this sad case was to summon the servants of the count, and that is what M. Jean determined to do. Rising from his knees he tried as best he might to make his way by the shortest road to the château. In a few moments he perceived a light approaching him through the trees, and at the same time he heard some people talking.

"This way, this way!" he cried as loud as he could.

A sound of hurried steps answered his cry, and an instant afterwards a man carrying a lantern entered the glade followed by two keepers armed with double-barrelled guns. Along with these came a tall man of aristocratic appearance, whom M. Jean remembered having seen at mass on the previous Sunday. It was the Count de Brames, and by his hurried gait it was evident that he had a presentiment of some disaster.

"Ah, sir!" cried the curé, the priest, "I was just about to call your servants. A murder has been committed here—Poor Michel!—Isn't it horrible?"

M. de Brames advanced a step or two, and recognising the dead body, started back in dismay.

"Then I was not deceived," he said in a voice of deep emotion. "I was seated at the drawing-room window when I heard the report of a gun, and somehow or other it flashed across my mind that it had been fired at Michel. But the villains! they had long hated him, and now they have killed him!"

The footman and his two companions were on their knees beside the corpse, exclaiming exclamations of pity for Michel, and maledictions against his murderers.

"Pardon me, your reverence," said the count, recovering himself and resuming his habitual studied politeness; "forgive my not having recognised you before. This horrible scene so troubled me that I lost my self-possession, and besides you are the last person I expected to find here—"

In these last words there was evidently a question politely concealed by an expression of astonishment, and M. Jean hastened to reply. "It was chance that brought me here," he said hurriedly; "an unfortunate chance, too, as I did not arrive in time to prevent the crime. I had stopped on the bank of the Marne when I heard a shot and then a second one, followed by a

cry of pain. I at once ran up here as quickly as I could and found the poor fellow breathing still: but I had only just time to give him absolution before he expired in my arms."

"And the murderer had disappeared?" said M. de Brennes, bitterly. "doubtless he is already in safety and hopes to escape pursuit: that is what happens in this unfortunate country; but this time I have a clue, almost proof, and we shall see if justice is again powerless. This is the third murder by poachers within a year in this neighbourhood. It is time that the atrocities ceased, and if I have to discover the perpetrator of the crime myself, if it costs me a fortune in detectives from Paris——"

"It won't do that, Monsieur le Comte," said one of the keepers, an old soldier. "I will wager a quarter's pension that the Parisian did the deed."

"The man that Michel caught poaching last month?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte, and I venture to say that he is not far off."

"Which way did he go? We must find that out before we set about pursuing him."

"Sir," said the curé, "when I was standing on the river's bank, at the moment the first shot was fired, I thought I heard footsteps in the wood in the direction of the path running alongside your park wall."

"Very probably. It is not likely that the murderer would make for the wood on our right, the brushwood is too dense. Still less would he have gone towards the village. You are right, your reverence, he must have gone by the river path, and I will——"

"But," interrupted M. Jean, "we can make sure of it at once. Before I entered the wood I was talking to a woman whom I had just met. I left her standing in the road, and told her to wait for me. She will certainly be able to tell us if anyone has come out of the wood, and if so which way he went."

"Then don't let us lose another moment," said the count, in a decided voice. "François," he added, addressing the footman, "do not move from this spot, and if any of the Charly people come here take care that no one touches the body or even approaches it. You, Bernard, run to the gendarmerie and tell the sergeant to bring his men. We may need them all to find this scoundrel. You, La Breteche," added the count to the old soldier, "come with his reverence and me, and help us to find this woman. But make haste, all of you; we must not give the murderer time to escape."

They set off at once, the old soldier leading the way and separating the branches with the barrel of his gun to make a passage for his master. His comrade had already gone to seek the gendarmes, and the footman alone remained beside the dead body, armed with nothing but a lantern, and not feeling at all comfortable. They descended the bank much more rapidly than the curé had climbed it, and when they reached the road M. Jean had the satisfaction of finding that the woman was still there. She was holding her children by the hand, and was preparing to leave, but on seeing the three men she paused.

"Have you seen him?" cried M. de Brennes, whilst the cunning La Breteche so placed himself as to prevent this witness in petticoats from escaping.

"What do you want with me?" asked the woman, somewhat frightened.

"Madame," said the curé, "the last shot we heard fired killed the count's gamekeeper."

"Good God! Then that cry was——"

"The death-cry of the unfortunate man. But we have every reason to believe that the murderer made off in this direction. Did you see anything him?"

"I saw a man suddenly appear in the wood at the corner of the wall here."

"The park wall," observed M. de Brannes. "I felt sure that he must have gone that way. No doubt he ran towards Joinville?"

"No, sir; he crossed the path and descended to the river. I think he went to hide the gun and the game he was carrying."

"Good! we'll soon find that out," exclaimed La Bretèche, turning round and running down to the Marne.

"Stop a moment," said the count, restraining him. "What did the man do after that?" he asked.

"He came back to the path and then went towards Joinville; but he was not running; on the contrary, he was walking quietly along."

"Then he can't be far off?"

"I don't think he can be."

"What was he like?" asked La Bretèche, forgetting the impoliteness of interrupting his master.

"He seemed to me tall and thin, and he wore a blouse and a large straw hat."

"That's what I thought. It was the Parisian!" cried the keeper.

"Whoever he was," said M. de Brannes, "we must find him. You say he followed the river?"

"Yes, sir," replied the woman.

"Good! It would take him more than an hour to reach Joinville, even if he walked quickly, so we may catch him yet."

"Yes, if he has not gone straight to the Charly railway station; there is a cross road a quarter of a mile from here," muttered M. Jean.

"True. And if he has gone to Paris the trace is lost."

"There's no danger of that, Monsieur le Comte; no doubt he has his reasons for not wishing to pass the fortifications, and he has others for keeping in the neighbourhood of Charly," said the old keeper.

"Well, let us try to catch him. Perhaps, too, it would be as well to keep an eye on this woman," muttered M. de Brannes to the curé. He did not speak low enough, however, for the singer heard him.

"There's no need of that, sir," she said with bitterness; "I am poor, but I do not take the part of such a wretch as that. To prove it, I will follow you."

"She'll only hinder us," grumbled the keeper.

"Yes; but she may help us to recognise the man," said the count.

"Certainly; and I am sure she is incapable of betraying us," remarked M. Jean.

"Come on, then!" cried M. de Brannes.

They set off, followed by the curé carrying the elder of the boys in his arms, while the mother carried the other one, and proceeded at a good pace. La Bretèche, with his gun loaded and ready to fire, led the way. The road they took was the one that M. Jean had traversed an hour before. Without meeting anyone they reached the cross road that led to the station, and there they halted, as it was necessary to come to some decision. By turning to the right they could quickly reach the station. By keeping to the left they would follow the winning course of the Marne, which was here very narrow and thickly wooded on both banks.

"It seems to me," said M. de Brannes, "that if the murderer hid his gun in front of the park wall he must intend to come back for it, and he cannot therefore be far off."

"That's true," said M. Jean; "and perhaps we had better return to this spot and keep watch there."

"With all respect, your reverence," observed the keeper, "that place will be a good one later on, but at present I think we ought not to give up pursuit. I hear singing in front of us, and I see a light. It must be some fresh-water sailors at their revels. I'll go and ask if they have seen a man in a blouse pass by."

"Let us all go," said the count. "I wish to question them myself."

After advancing a hundred paces or so they came upon one of the strangest scenes they had ever witnessed. On the grassy bank of the river a tent of striped linen stuff had been erected, through the opening of which were to be seen the preparations for a brilliant banquet, lit up by four candles and half a dozen Venetian lanterns. The knives and forks were laid on a Turkey carpet, with an abundance of glass, and several bottles of champagne. Reclining in Turkish fashion, or couched like Romans of the decline, four guests were preparing to do honour to this rustic supper whilst a fifth was actively engaged in extracting a variety of eatables and drinkables from the depths of an immense basket.

All five were most strangely attired. Two of them were women, and wore Turkish dresses of the most fantastic pattern, whilst the men were clothed in scarlet boating-costumes and wore enormous Panama hats. The one who was unpacking the basket would have been taken by a savage chief for one of his tribe, for he was wrapped in an enormous white burnous and had his head adorned with a crown of feathers.

M. Jean, little acquainted with the manners of boating-men on the Marne, paused, astonished, and somewhat frightened at this bivouac of highly-civilised Redskins; and the Count de Brannes, not being in a joyful mood, did not care to put questions to persons from whom he could not expect to get any useful information. La Bretèche, accustomed to the ways of these boating-men, was not so much astonished, and went straight up to the tall fellow in the feathered head-dress to ask him about the poacher. Hardly had the keeper come within radius of the glow of light issuing from the tent than a clamour of noise greeted his arrival.

"A stranger! a pale-face in the wigwam of the Red Indian!" shouted a deep bass voice above the chorus of shrill female voices. "Scalp him, Brave Buffalo, and bring in his hairy locks."

"None of your nonsense, you buffoons," said La Bretèche. "I want a proper answer to my question, and have the right to demand it. I suppose you see my badge?"

Brave Buffalo now abandoned his interesting occupation and came forward probably with the intention of making some ill-timed joke, more appropriate to the savannahs of America.

"Monsieur Julien!" exclaimed the old keeper as he found himself face to face with this sham Mohican.

"What! it's you, La Bretèche," said the young savage, roaring with laughter. "By Jove, this is a queer meeting. How is my uncle getting on?"

"Your uncle is here, sir," observed the Count de Brannes, suddenly appearing. "I see what a free life you are leading—how much more amusement you manage to have than when you were with me."

"Uncle, I assure you that—had I but known—I did not expect —"

hammered the unfortunate nephew, making every effort to look respectable in his leggings and breeches, and by no means succeeding in doing so.

"Oh, oh!" put in the man with the deep bass voice.

"Beuve Brûlé is smoking the pipe of you, with the pale faces! Let us leave him, and will fight him the talk of Red Indians."

The count hurriedly drew aside by an active hand, and as readily fell back, not without allowing M. Jean to catch a sight of the preparations for the grand party.

"I can quite understand that you get more amusement out of such societies than you used to do at the chateau," continued M. de Brennes, "but you might as well take your diversion at a greater distance from Masseneuil."

"I feel, my uncle, that it is quite by chance that —"

"Then I find you disguised as a Canadian Indian. I don't doubt it. I suppose it was quite by chance that you exchanged your lawyer's gown for his tinsel, and carry on all this nonsense?"

"It's all my friends' idea," said Julien excitedly. "I give you my word of honour, I did not even know those women this morning, and shall have forgotten all about them by this evening."

The count still was laughing at the volubility with which this nephew was uttering his words. Perhaps he had guessed why his nephew was so anxious to justify a feeling which was quite pardonable in a young lawyer of his age and talent. The opportunity was not a good one for moralising, and M. de Brennes did not feel inclined to a much more serious subject.

"We will discuss the matter now, Julien," he said, lowering his voice. "A dreadful thing has happened; some one has just shot my poor keeper, Michel, dead."

"What?" exclaimed the young man, "what an awful thing! But where, and when, and who?"

"About five hundred paces from here, in the little Billère wood, bordering the park, and I don't know one for better, the murderer to be a poacher well known in the neighbourhood. We are on his track. We think he must have come down the towing path, and when I caught sight of your lights, I went on La Bretèche to ask if you had seen a man in blouse pass this way."

"Tell him, in a blue blouse, and a broad-brimmed straw hat?"

"That's all, except the colour. You must have seen him then? Was it long ago? In which direction was he going?"

Julien took his uncle's arm and said in a low voice, as he pointed to the river, "He is just over there."

"What?"

"Yes. Just now a man, dressed exactly as I say, came and offered to sell us a pheasant."

"Which he had killed in my woods, before murdering my keeper, the wretch!"

"I had no idea the pheasant would honestly come by, and I declined to purchase it. Then the man insisted he should catch us some crayfish in the Masseneuil, and we agreed with him to do so. Then he is in our boat."

"Then we are sure of the scoundrel," muttered La Bretèche between his teeth.

"This almost excuses your boating expedition," continued the count, "and I forgive you, but we must not let the villain escape us; you go and call him; La Bretèche shall immediately seize him, and I hope your five

friends who are drinking in there will, if necessary, lend us a helping hand."

"Certainly, my dear uncle: I myself have pretty strong wrists, and could undertake to tackle him single-handed, but——"

"But what? Are you going to plead for him?"

"By no means, uncle, only this man's impudence seems something startling. Setting to work to catch crayfish, within a few feet of the place where you have just committed a murder, is not exactly a likely proceeding. You must agree with me there."

"It certainly is a most cool proceeding. But we'll leave all such arguments to the counsel who defends him at the assizes, and meanwhile——"

"Silence, here he is," whispered Julien.

In fact, a man was seen slowly climbing up the bank, net in hand, and, thanks to the full moon, his figure and dress could be plainly identified.

"That's the man—that's the murderer," said the street singer, in a stifled voice.

"This way, my friend," called M. de Brannes's nephew, "here are some more claimants for your crayfish."

"I'm coming, sir; I have had rare good luck, for I have got three dozen. They give me three francs a piece for them at the Café Anglais." While saying this he doffed his hat to the new arrivals.

"Robert!" shrieked the poor woman, drawing back in surprise and terror.

At this scream of horror, and at the name which he never dreamt of hearing at such a time or place, the man sprang forward, and before La Bretèche could prevent him, he seized the singer by the arm, and pulled her towards him to look at her more closely.

"Eugénie!" he exclaimed, pushing her away from him indignantly. Then throwing away his nets, he was about to take flight; but La Bretèche was beforehand with him, seized him by the collar, and made him prisoner on the spot.

The old guard, however, was not strong enough to hold so young and strong a fellow as the poacher, who struggled with all his strength, and would probably have effected his escape without the opportune intervention of Brave Buffalo. Nephew Julien justified his title to the name by wrestling bravely with the refractory prisoner, who was not unlikely to be armed, and inclined to repay a meddler in other folks' affairs by a stab.

Happily, the man, who had still plenty of strength in him, felt that he would be ultimately overpowered, and suddenly desisted in his attempt at escape, saying, "It's not worth while to strangle me, and prevent my escaping from you. Leave go! Dence take you! I won't make off."

They then let go, but gathered closely round him—La Bretèche standing on one side of him and Julien on the other.

"O Robert, it's you!" repeated the horrified singer.

"Yes, certainly it's me!" said the poacher sharply. "I never thought we should meet here, nor you either, as far as I can understand."

"Ah!" exclaimed the unhappy mother, "it was necessary, then, for a crime to be committed to bring us face to face."

"What crime? I have done nothing," muttered Robert, shrugging his shoulders: "and I should like to know what I am wanted here for."

The group at this moment collected on the banks of the Marne would have formed an interesting study for a theatrical manager. The prisoner was fuming like a wolf caught in a trap while the pseudo savage was

threatening him with his fists, and the keeper held him within reach of his fist also. The count and M. Jean were grouped round the singer, who held himself steady; one terrified child was hiding behind its mother's skirts, and the other behind the priest's cassock. To complete the picture, made up of the members of the hunting party of lord and master, gathered in their tent by the noise of the combat, made up a picturesque background.

"Yes, I wish to know what you want with me?" demanded the poacher a second time.

"It's I who ought to put questions, and not you," said M. de Brannes, dryly. "What were you doing just now in the Beliere woods, close to my park?"

"Ha! ha!" observed Robert with the same insolence. "It seems that you have the notion of conversation with the lord and master of the Chasseneuil estate."

"What has that to do with my question, you rascal?"

"Oh, no abuse, please! You mean that I occasionally venture to hunt your some of your game? Ah, well! it's quite likely. I have particular notions on the subject. Besides, it's not much use my denying it, as I've already been caught by one of your keepers."

"He owns it, the scoundrel, and that's what he has taken his revenge for," exclaimed La Bretèche.

"I own nothing at all, you old doped over-campaigner, except that I've shot over the grounds of his honour, and forgot to ask his permission, which he would have been certain to refuse."

"Quite correct," said M. de Brannes; "you are also ready to own, I suppose, that you had just killed a pheasant there."

This time Robert made no reply.

"You just pointed to us that we should buy it," said M. Julien. "All these gentlemen repeat what you say to it if not to be."

"And these gentlemen, too, I suppose? In the face of such respectable witnesses I can raise no objections. Certainly I have killed a pheasant; what next?"

"And you have killed it, as well as your game on the bank, near the water's edge. Don't deny it. That woman saw you."

"She!" cried Robert, looking at the singer, with eyes sparkling with anger. "Ah! it was she who denounced me! It's worth while knowing that!"

"You are mistaken," said M. Jean. "It was quite by chance, and, furthermore, you will be obliged to acquit you, as you are well aware."

"His wife!" repeated M. de Brannes, amazed.

"Yes, sir," whispered the count; "at the time the shots were heard I was talking on the river bank to this poor creature, who was telling me all her misfortunes, and of her husband's disappearance, which had left her entirely to her own resources. She had discovered him again, and under that sad circumstances, good heavens!"

"In fact they have mutually recognised each other," murmured the count. "I pity this unhappy woman, but I think it will be wise not to see signs of her. In such a critical situation it is as well to distrust everybody; besides, her evidence is most important."

"I don't think she has the least wish to escape," replied M. Jean, in a low tone; "she would rather follow him to prison if she could, for she still loves him."

The sense of these side remarks was speedily caught by the poacher, who scornfully observed: "Yes, gentlemen, it was certainly my wife who was at hand to cause me to be arrested. The meeting was a most providential one, was it not? But, if I am not mistaken, sir, you did not leave your chateau to discuss my domestic affairs with me, and I shall be much obliged by your acquainting me with what you have to say."

"Really, this is going too far," said M. de Brannes, confounded less by the man's impudence than by his choice of language.

"What is going too far?" answered the poacher. "I am caught in the act of poaching, or very nearly so, and know what is in store for me: a fine which I laugh at for good reasons, and imprisonment, which may be for a long term perhaps, as it is my second offence. Your keeper has only to draw up a report, and I'll not prevent your fetching the gendarmes; but there is no need any longer to disturb this respectable company, bent on their own amusement." When adding this parting thrust he pointed to the boating men who stood near him, and then resumed: "Just ask your nephew for his opinion."

A low groan from the strolling singer followed this impertinent onslaught. The wretched Eugénie felt ready to faint, and perhaps, if one had known what was uppermost in her mind, one would have recognised that she was less troubled by her husband's terrible position than by his disdainful indifference towards her, she who had always adored him. The good cure took compassion on her, and drew her gently a little way from the assembled group.

"It is not simply a question of poaching," said M. de Brannes, looking at the poacher steadily in the face.

"Pooh! of what else, then? Does it happen to be something connected with my wife's wrongs, which your nephew there proposes to plead as a pretext for a judicial separation? I believe the gentleman is a barrister. If I have heard rightly?"

"This jesting is very much out of place; and you are doing yourself more harm than good," whispered M. Julien in the ear of the accused.

Brave Buffalo had again assumed his personality as a young man of fashion and a newly-fledged lawyer. The court, irritated by the poacher's audacity, was ready to stigmatize him as a murderer to his face, but he reflected that it would be better to have him securely handcuffed before reproaching him with his crime, and he answered coldly:

"You are acquainted with Michel, are you not?"

"Who is Michel?" answered the man, without the least agitation.

"My keeper."

"That's not particularly clear, since you have three or four. However, I suppose you mean the Abbaton fellow, who served in the Zouaves?"

"Exactly so. You don't deny having had certain relations with him?"

"Not in the least: I have good reasons for remembering him, and not too pleasant reasons either. He once caught me laying snares in your preserves at Apilly, and was the cause of my undergoing three weeks' imprisonment. I shall pay him out for it some day."

This was spoken so glibly, and in such a natural tone of voice, that M. de Brannes was quite dumbfounded.

"So you confess that you are irritated with Michel?" he asked, after a short pause.

"I confess I am," said the poacher calmly, "as I equally confess that I have killed one of your pheasants."

"Then you will please to follow me at once."

"Stop a bit! It seems you constitute yourself a self-made policeman! Is it a peculiar thing for a gentleman to do! Where do you want to take me?"

"To the place where you first hid your gun, and then ——"

"All right; don't follow yourself any more, sir; I am willing to be done with it, were it only to please my wife, who has given you so much useful information," replied Robert, glancing towards the singer.

"La Bretèche! Keep an eye on that man on the way," ordered M. de Blamès.

"Julien, you will not leave us, I suppose? I am sorry to take you from friends and family friends, but you may be of use to us in more ways than one, and ——"

"I am at your service, uncle; and to my lady friends, I assure you ——"

"All right; you shall explain everything at the chateau, when you have used your discretion, which will take for granted. Just now all that is essential for you to do is to accompany us, in order to lend us a hand in case the man resists."

"Resistance! I repeat! What for? I have just told you I will go, and word is all that counts," said the poacher coolly. "Only, these boating fishermen, to prevent fishing, ought to be sent to the coast-guard, or to be put in jail, but as there are but three dozen English, hissing in my ear, that I have spent ten or twelve five-franc pieces for them. That can't be too much to buy tobacco with while in prison."

"They'll give you plenty of tobacco, you ruffian," growled La Bretèche, between his teeth.

The count, with a severe glance imposed silence on the keeper; then, turning towards the priest, said:

"Come, your reverence, will you be good enough to take care of this poor young woman? And," he added in a lower tone, pointing to the singer, "could anyone have believed that there was such an impudent wretch?"

"If he is guilty," muttered nephew Julien, "he is the greatest actor of the day."

"If you don't object, gentlemen," said the poacher coolly, "as nobody was willing to buy my fish, I will present them to the corporal of Blamès. I am probably fated to cultivate his acquaintance pretty often, and shall presently convert to friendship." And the fellow, having picked up and shouldered the net containing his fish, walked forward, chin in air, and hid his hands in his pockets.

La Bretèche never moved a foot's breadth from him, and he was soon overtaken by Julien, who had only taken sufficient time to request his boating friends to wait for his return. The count and M. de Blamès followed, with the two children and their unhappy mother.

Good M. Jean began to lose his head among all these singular events, the horrible murder, which he had almost witnessed; a dramatic meeting between an unhappy woman and a wicked husband, whom he had brought to her by mistake; so much had not happened to him, during the forty years he had spent at his peaceful estate in the Versailles diocese, that to mention the possibility of being mixed up in a case of crime galled him, and the prospect of contributing such meretricious evidence as must tend to the conviction of the accused, for he, the minister of God of peace, would be the instrument of sending a fellow-creature to the

scaffold. This idea upset him to such a degree, that he half regretted not having gone quietly on his way, instead of running in the direction of the gun-shot he had heard. As to Brave Buffalo, otherwise Julien de Chanterrie, his fears and doubts ran in another direction. He regretted having been caught by his uncle in such wild company, and he especially feared his relating the story of the tribe of Indians to his daughter Mademoiselle Gabrielle de Brannes, who had just left the convent where she had been educated, and was at this very moment at the Château de Chasseneuil.

The count with difficulty controlled himself, for he was deeply attached to the unfortunate man Michel. La Bretèche made great efforts not to avenge his comrade by blowing out the murderer's brains. The singer prayed in low voice that she might die, and gazed sadly at the river, in whose depths she might find an end to her misery : the children wept.

Of all those concerned, in various ways, with the lamentable business, perhaps the poacher Robert, "the Parisian," as the people of Charly called him, was the least concerned. He went along with a blithe step, whistling Nadaud's air, "The two Gendarmes." You would have taken him for a boatman come ashore on his way down the Marne. He never uttered a word, however, and, until they had passed M. de Brannes's park, the journey was accomplished in perfect silence. There, the old keeper, who kept close to his prisoner, seized him somewhat brutally by the elbow, saying: "Halt ! here we are at the corner of the wood, the gun must be hidden not far from here." And turning towards the singer, he said roughly to her: "Come ! you woman, show us the hiding-place, as you were there, when he fired the shot."

"I saw nothing, and shall show you nothing," said the poor woman excitedly.

La Bretèche was going to burst out, but the count readily recognised that it would be too cruel to force the unhappy woman to help people acting against her husband. "It is unnecessary ! the hiding place cannot be hard to find, we shall hunt for it," he said, making a sign to M. Jean, who thanked him with a warm-hearted glance.

"Don't give yourselves the trouble to hunt," said the poacher, "it is in that hollow willow over yonder ; you see I don't take any pleasure in tormenting you, but you are under no obligations to me, for if I shorten your trouble it is simply because I want to get out of my wife's sight as soon as I can, and I hope she will not follow me to prison——"

"Shut up. It's cowardly to talk like that," said Julien de la Chanterrie in a tone which seemed to produce some impression on Robert, for, instead of continuing, he now contented himself with shrugging his shoulders.

"Monsieur le Comte, here are the gendarmes coming," exclaimed La Bretèche.

In fact, muskets were seen gleaming through the neighbouring thickets, and the clatter of side arms was heard. It was the sergeant who now appeared on the scene with two of his men. On seeing the assembled group waiting for them on the road they hastened up. "Ah ! Monsieur le Comte, what a business !" said the sergeant, raising his three-cornered hat ; "I should never have thought that these rogues would have the cheek to kill a man at less than five hundred yards from the barracks. But, this time we will catch the fellow who fired the shot or I'll lose my stripes. I have already some evidence, and we will track him out——"

"You needn't give yourself the trouble, sergeant, we hold him," interrupted La Bretèche. "It is the individual you see there."

No, really ! but yes—it's he ! it's the Parisian ! Ah ! I recognise the
I perfectly ! I have had a description of his person in my mind for a
time past."

So have I you : I recognise you well, sergeant," said the singer's husband,
ngly : " the last time we met, you did me the honour of arresting me.
low doesn't forget that sort of thing readily."

All right ! All right ! we shall see if you will continue joking by-and-
Come ! you fellows, clap the handcuffs on him."

The gendarmes hastened to obey, and as the poacher offered no resistance
operation was soon accomplished. " Ah ! ah ! " said Robert with a fine
; " last time you did not put them on me. Have the regulations
ged ? "

Last time the case was one of robbing rabbits, but this time the
tion of clause 302 of the Penal Code is in question, my fine fellow,"
ed the sergeant, almost merrily, for the case with which this important
ure had been effected delighted him.

Excuse me, sergeant," answered Robert, " but as I never studied law,
ou may well imagine, may I be allowed to ask what this wonderful
se 302 refers to ? "

It merely refers to the penalty of death : but there are other clauses in
same Code dealing with wilful murder of pheasants."

Good ! I understand now. I had premeditated killing a pheasant, and I
singly waited for it under the tree on which it was perched."

Enough, please," said the sergeant reprovingly. " Your case is already
enough, and when a fellow has just murdered a man he ought not to
lge in jesting."

What ! I have murdered a man ! " exclaimed Robert, abruptly regain-
his gravity.

You are not going to pretend that this is the first news you have
? Not on your oath, in the woods of Le Bèlère, you killed Michel, the
er of the Count de Brannes here present.

Michel ! the old soldier who summoned me ? "

Yes, Michel when you had a grudge against since that affair. Your
ended a foolishness of no earthly use. That style of thing does
go down with me."

The count was quite amazed at the audacity of this fellow, who persisted
fleeing in silence, when there was so much circumstantial evidence
st him. His nephew Julien was struck by the sudden change of
ession which came over the poacher's face. His features contracted,
he hid down his eyes, as if he wished to collect his thoughts. Was it
ect of surprise and indignation at an unjust charge, or rather a sign
motion of seeing himself unmasked, something like the feelings a
ier experiences on finding his retreat from the battle-field cut off ? At
events, Robert soon recovered his self-possession. " I had a grudge
st him, but it's quite possible," he said raising his head, " but it was not
o killed him, for I had not met him for more than a month, and I didn't
know that——"

You can tell all that to the investigating magistrates," interrupted the
eant.

Do you think that if I were guilty I should have amused myself by
ling beside the Marne, instead of making off to Paris ? "

That's a bit of special pleading all ready for your counsel, but we have

not yet reached the Assize Court, my fine fellow, and as I have you in custody I must now begin my enquiry."

"To begin with," said M. de Brannes, "I ought to tell you that we found him fishing for cray-fish, which he offered for sale to my nephew here."

The sergeant looked at Julien with a certain amount of astonishment. The burnous and feather head-dress upset all his ideas as to the manner of the upper circles of society, to which Count de Brannes's nephew doubtless belonged. "He offered them to my nephew and his friends, who were boating down here," continued the master of Chasseneuil.

"Good! I understand now," said the sergeant with a knowing look.

"I must add that the man made no difficulty about admitting that he had just killed a pheasant, and had hidden his game and gun in the hollow of that willow tree."

"The gun! Monsieur le Comte, oh! that's perfect, and with such a piece of evidence I should be a mere novice if I did not bring everything to light. *Piclouche*," said the sergeant to one of his gendarmes, "go and search the hiding-place, and bring everything you find in it."

The sound of a sob made him turn his head and he saw the singer, who he had not previously remarked in the haste of his first inquiries. "Who is that person?" he asked with a frown.

"She's that wretched man's wife," replied M. Jean in a low tone.

"Really, your reverence, I didn't see you either, ah! she's his wife, she! Deuce take me if I thought such a ruffian could be a married man."

To M. Jean's great satisfaction the sergeant's remarks were interrupted by the return of his subordinate, who re-appeared on the bank, triumphant, carrying at arm's length a pheasant and the weapon with which it had been killed. The poacher did not stir, and M. Julien who was watching him, did not see the least sign of emotion on his face.

"Hand the gun to me," said the sergeant; "I know all about that kind of article." And he at once took possession of the weapon, which was a vile double-barrelled firearm, part of the barrels of which, once very long, had been sawn off, no doubt so that the poacher might at need hide the gun under his blouse. The intelligent non-commissioned officer of the gendarmes, examined this wretched weapon in a hasty and apparently somewhat careless manner. "Now my fine fellow," he continued; "just give me some particulars as to what you did in the Bélière wood; it ought not to embarrass you to do so as you admit that you went for a stroll there at dusk."

"It's a simple matter," coldly said the prisoner, who had given up joking since he knew the gravity of the charge against him. "I had already been caught once in the underwood at Apilly, and I knew that the keepers were always on the look out in that direction. So I was not such a fool as to go there; but as I had noticed that the pheasants in Chasseneuil park came every evening to feed at the edge of the Bélière woods, I thought to myself that no one would be on the watch so close to the château. I had my gun hidden close at hand, so I went off strolling along the riverside; and on my way I even set some pots for cray-fish over there, just where those boating gentlemen came ashore."

"What o'clock was it when you entered the wood?"

"My watch found its way to the pawnshop a good while ago. All I know is, it had been dark for the last twenty minutes at the least."

"Good! And you went to work almost at once?"

"I knew a good spot and went straight to it."

"And whereabouts was your good spot?"

"Over yonder, a little to the right: there are two or three oak-standers, low branches, which look as if they had grown on purpose, for pheasants to perch on."

"Then you indulged in a perfect massacre, eh?"

"Why, no! I killed the bird, your honour, is holding by the legs: it's a young cock, which I should have got fully four francs for. That pleased me for my evening, the more so as I felt afraid that the people at the château would hurry up on hearing the report. So I picked up the bird, started off as fast as I could, and hung it! there's no need to tell you the rest: you know it as well as I do, as I was collared half-an-hour afterwards."

All this was said deliberately, clearly, without hesitation, or needless details, and the brief narrative made a favourable impression on M. Jean, Julien, and even on the Count de Brannes. "And so you only hit one?" said the sergeant absently; he was seemingly absorbed in deep meditation.

"Naturally, as I merely fired at one."

"Then how do you account for the fact that both barrels of your gun were charged?" This question was asked *en passant* in a clear incisive voice. Evidently, the sergeant, past-master in legal fencing, had kept this unexpected thrust for the finish. "Just look, gentlemen," he added showing two fingers, which he had snuffed down the barrels of the gun, and which now displayed begrimed with powder.

The poacher, visibly disturbed, took his time to answer. However, he recovered his possession, and said, without displaying much emotion, "I fired both shots at the same time. I never miss doing that when I'm shooting at night. To hit a pheasant perched on a tree, when you fire the shot in both barrels isn't at all too much."

A murmur of incredulity greeted this statement, and Julien de la Motte said in a low voice to M. Jean: "I was half inclined to think he was innocent, but I'm in two fears that we have a cunning rascal to deal with."

"Well, his reverence is elsewhere on the outskirts of the wood, and heard nothing," said M. de Brannes.

"I heard two distinct reports," murmured M. Jean.

"Two reports; not three?" asked the sergeant.

"Two only, and I believe some interval between them. Between the first and second a full minute, or at least a half, must have elapsed."

"And they both came from the same direction?"

"Nearly so. The first shot came from a little farther from me."

"But the sound still came from the summit of the slope, and a little to the right?"

"Yes, I am certain of it," said the good priest, half regretfully, for he fully understood the consequences of his declaration.

"That's not quite exact," replied the poacher, "I killed the pheasant almost half way up the slope, and I was going off in the direction of the oak wall when I heard a shot much nearer the high road to Charly. You can quite understand that I did not go back to see what it was."

"Good! but that would make three reports, and his reverence only heard two."

"Because he mistook the two discharges of my gun for a single one. Ask any sportsman you like if the sharpest person can't sometimes be mistaken in this respect."

This fresh attempt at justification did not seem of any more weight than the first ones, and M. Julien, who never missed opening the season on uncle's estate, slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"I ought in justice to own," said M. Jean, "that the first report made much more noise than the second one."

"Because the gun was fired much nearer to you," related the sergeant.

"I will add," continued the priest, "that during the interval between the two reports, I fancied I heard some one walking through the wood, in the direction of the park wall."

"That was I—so you see," exclaimed Robert.

"I'm not quite sure about all that, my lad," replied the cautious sergeant, "and I am going to give my ideas as to how things happened. It's simple enough as you said just now. You had just killed your servant, and were going to pick it up, when Michel, who was watching you, made his appearance and surprised you. Then you fired your second shot at him in close range."

"It's not true. I killed nobody and saw nobody."

"I understand, my lad: you and all the rest of them go on the same tack and sometimes jurymen are taken in by it. As a proof of what I say I remember the rascal who murdered a keeper in the *forêt de la woele* last winter, and who obtained the admission of extenuating circumstances; however, this time, I greatly hope——"

"Sergeant, I implore you," murmured the worthy priest, pointing toward the poor woman, who at this moment stood a few paces off, suffering frightful tortures.

"Don't be alarmed, your reverence, I'll shew due regard for her," said the sergeant in a low voice, "and if she's really the second lord's wife, I think I can let her off from attending at the confrontation with the dead body."

"What? a confrontation?"

"Yes, Michel's body is still up there with two of my men watching over it, and it is absolutely necessary that the rascal who killed him should be present at the inquiry I shall hold on the spot; but you see women are rather superstitious on those occasions on account of their nerves."

"It seems to me useless to take her with us," said M. de Brannes, "however, if her evidence is very important——"

"Her evidence?" replied the sergeant, who was ignorant of the part that the strolling singer had taken, solely against her will, in the poetical arrest.

"Yes," answered the count. "She was with her children on the highway; she saw the man leave the wood, and it was she who pointed out to us the direction he had taken."

"The deuce she did! that makes it a different matter, and I can't take upon myself to let her off like that; the more especially as with her guitar on her back she looks as if she sang at suburban fairs, and virtuosos of that kind never have any need of alms. If I let her go I should not perhaps be able to find her again."

"That's true, but there is a way out of the difficulty. I will have her taken to the chateau, where she and her children will be cared for, until the examining magistrate, entrusted with the enquiry, comes to a decision concerning her."

"Oh! that would do very well indeed," exclaimed the sergeant.

"And I," said M. Jean, "I thank you Monsieur le Comte, on behalf of this unhappy woman who is really worthy of pity."

These remarks were rapidly exchanged out of the hearing of everyone sent, that is excepting M. Julien, who now approached the priest and whispered in his ear: "I can't help taking an interest in that poor woman and may I confess it?—in her miserable husband as well. This man is badly frightened, and yet there is something inexplicable in his tone and ring. I should feel tempted to follow the matter up like a problem."

"Alas! I greatly fear that the solution will be a fatal one," muttered M. n. "I was present at the victim's death, and——"

"Gentlemen," said the sergeant, in what he called his official tone of voice, "I must request you to follow me for I have to continue the enquiry. For you," he added, turning towards the strolling singer, "you will be among the witnesses to-morrow, and to-night Monsieur de Brannes will allow you to sleep at the Chateau of Chassenepil. His keeper will take you there."

"I shall not leave my husband," said the woman excitedly.

"You must, however. Don't alarm yourself, you will soon see him in; but, just now, we have no time to lose in explanations. So——"

"La Breteche!" called M. de Brannes, "you are to accompany this son; go round by the park railing and tell my majordomo that I wish to have her lodged in the vacant room above the stables."

"Accept his kindness," said M. Jean gently to the poor woman, who was weeping bitterly as she looked at Robert, "Accept it if only for the sake of your poor children——"

"And abandon him when I already have to reproach myself with causing his ruin!"

"The case isn't hopeless yet, and I promise you I will do all I can to have him leniently treated."

"And I," said Julien de la Chanterie, "I will do my best to help him to save his innocence."

The singer expressed her thanks with a heartfelt look, and taking her two children by the hand, she followed La Bretèche, without having the courage to turn round and wish Robert good-bye. It was with tearless eyes that he watched her leave. "Come, gentlemen," continued the sergeant, "we must make haste if you please. In affairs of this kind, tidiness is everything, if the inquiry is to be satisfactory. A shower of rain, or a storm of wind, obliterate the traces of feet, or wash away gun-wads, no time, and I am most anxious not to lose anything."

"I understand," said Robert ironically, "You fancy my conviction will make you a rise in rank, perhaps make you a quarter-master. A good idea, and in your place I should do the same. Only I warn you that I mean to defend myself."

"You have a perfect right to do so."

"Well to begin with, take me to the spot where I killed the pheasant, or the three oak saplings, half way up the slope to the right. Perhaps we shall still find a few feathers there; that would delight you, as you don't want to lose anything."

"Hallo! Are you in command here? One would think I had to take my orders from an individual like you."

"What he asks for seems reasonable," said M. de Brannes, softly.

"All right!" answered the sergeant, rather vexed at the count's remark; "you will be taken there, prisoner; but even when you *have* proved to me that you killed the pheasant perched on an oak tree, you won't have done much good for yourself. I don't contradict you in that respect, and I don't at all see what you will gain by showing me a lot of feathers."

"Excuse me, but if I show them to you at some distance from the spot where the keeper fell, that will go towards proving that I was not surprised at the moment I shot the bird, and consequently that I had no motive for killing him."

"The rogue has arguments at hand, which would do honour to an old quibbler," said La Chanterie in a low voice. "He's decidedly smart."

"It would be better for him to be innocent," murmured the priest sadly.

"As for your motive," resumed the sergeant, pettishly, "just remember your grudge against Michel, who caught you out poaching last month. As all events everything will be duly authenticated, you may be sure of that. I know what it is to draw up a report. Now, gentlemen: Piédouche, run forward, tell Dr. Minard that we are coming, and return with a lantern, so that in verifying the prisoner's allegations we may be able to see distinctly."

"You brought a doctor here then?" asked M. de Brannes.

"Certainly, Monsieur le Comte, in these sort of cases, it is an elementary precaution."

When the worthy sergeant made use of such choice expressions, it was always an indication that he considered his dignity slighted.

"You were more cautious than I was," said the count, as a sop to the gendarme's wounded pride.

"And we were lucky, for Dr. Minard hasn't his equal for performing a *post-mortem* examination. Before settling at Charly, he did five years for *pusic* practice as an expert attached to the courts of justice. But we are losing time here. Move forward, prisoner, and as you make so certain about the business, first show us your clump of trees."

"That's just what I want to do," grumbled Robert.

"You will recognise them again?"

"I could find them with my eyes shut?"

"All right! we are going to them, but no nonsense on the way, mind. If you try to give us the slip, you will only get a bullet through you."

"You can be easy on that score, I shan't put your gendarmes to the trouble of firing at me. Besides, how do you expect me to try and run off handcuffed as I am."

Thereupon the poacher walked on across the wood, between two men in uniform, who kept particularly close to him.

"Are you coming with us, Julien?" said the count to his nephew, who seemed to hesitate about following the party.

"Well, uncle," stammered young La Chanterie, "I am really dressed —"

"In a highly improper style, no doubt; and you richly deserve to be condemned to appear in it before your cousin."

"Uncle, I implore you——"

"Don't alarm yourself. I will allow you to go and dress decently before you show yourself at the château. But I want you to be present at the inquiry, for I attach great importance to the conviction of the murderer, and you may assist in proving his guilt."

"And I, sir," said M. Jean softly, "beg of you to come with us; you may perhaps be able to establish the innocence of this wretched man, whom I cannot help pitying."

Julien, clasped the good priest's hand in silence, and they both joined the procession.

The poacher, Robert, who for the moment guided the march, advanced into the wood like a man confident in the accuracy of his assertions, and speedily reached the foot of the three tall trees he had referred to. The

sergeant there met his subaltern, Piédouche, who was returning, provided with a lantern, to announce that the doctor had almost completed his preliminary examination.

"This is where I stood when I fired," said Robert, without the least hesitation; "the pheasant was perched up there on that main branch, and fell here—look! I told you so, here are some feathers."

And indeed when the gendarme stooped down with his lantern, he picked up three or four golden-hued feathers, which had evidently fallen from the tail of the young cock pheasant that his comrade still carried.

"Feathers signify nothing, as you know very well," exclaimed the sergeant.

"Perhaps not, but look around you a bit, my charge was rammed down with felt wads, cut with a punch. If you find four, or only three, that will prove, I suppose, that I fired both my shots on this spot."

"Oh! you can put more than two wads in one barrel. That's been done before."

"Here is one anyhow," said the gendarme, throwing a light from his lantern upon the ground. And he exhibited a small round blackened fragment, which he had just picked up at the foot of the tree. On one point, at any rate, Robert had spoken the truth, still this was a point of but little importance.

"That may be of use to us," said the sergeant, "but you will understand, my fine fellow, that we can't search here all night for needles in a hay-rick. We are wanted over yonder. We will return here to-morrow if the investigating magistrate judges it necessary."

"Really! And what about the rain which will efface everything, and the wind which blew all traces away, as you yourself said just now."

"That'll do! it is no sufficient weather, and if necessary I will set a man on duty here. Is there anything else you want to show me here?"

"The ground is too dry for me to see my footprints, but I could certainly find in the brush plenty of broken branches, which would prove that I made off with the pheasant in the direction of the park."

"The brush won't be burnt down between now and to-morrow. At present we have to go and see Dr. Minard, who must be getting impatient."

The poacher shrugged his shoulders, but did not insist, and the party again set off.

"This man's guilt no longer seems so certain to me," muttered M. Julien.

"Please God, you may be right!" said M. Jean, shaking his head doubtfully.

From the spot where the pheasant had been killed, to that where the unfortunate man Michel had fallen, there was merely a distance of thirty paces, but it was necessary to climb a somewhat steep incline. When the prisoner and his escort reached the glade, where the corpse lay, the doctor had just concluded his painful task. M. Minard, a young man of good appearance, stepped with a polite air towards M. de Brames, and bowed to him with all the deference due to the richest landowner of Charly.

"Well, Dr. Minard?" asked the count.

"Well, Monsieur le Comte, your keeper must have died almost instantaneously. As far as I can ascertain by my examination here, he was struck at close range by a charge of shot which "balled," and inflicted dreadful injuries, the left clavicle broken, the subclavian artery severed, the oesophagus torn——"

"You are sure doctor that it was a charge of shot?" asked the sergeant.

"I am certain of it. Besides the necropsy will go to prove it."

"And it will be known for certain whether the shot found in the pheasant is of the same number as that found in Michel's body."

M. Jean and Julien de la Chanterie looked at Robert, who appeared perfectly calm. There remained one decisive test, the most terrible ordeal to a guilty conscience. The sergeant took the prisoner by the arm, led him up to the dead body, extended on its back, already stiffened by death, and with its ghastly face lighted up by the lantern held by a servant in attendance. "Do you recognise him?" asked the non-commissioned officer.

Robert grew pale, but he answered in a steady voice, "How can I do otherwise, since he caught me barely more than a month ago? But I am as innocent of his death as you yourself are."

"A real murderer would be profuse in his protestations," muttered Julien. "When people express themselves in that simple manner, it's because they have an easy conscience."

"You must prove that to the jury," now answered the sergeant. "Meanwhile, prisoner, I must lock you up in the barracks; you will probably be questioned there by the investigating magistrate to-morrow, and transferred to Paris during the day."

"Where can the *post-mortem* take place?" asked the doctor, who was in no wise sorry of an opportunity to display his science and skill in judicial matters.

"We have a suitable room above the mayor's office, and I am going to have the corpse conveyed there. Piédouche, first send all those people about their business," added the sergeant, pointing at a group of inquisitive folks from Charly.

"We had better retire, there is nothing more for us to do here," said M. de Brannes, whom the sight of the dead body affected painfully. "Julien, I won't detain you any longer; however, I rely on you breakfasting with us to-morrow at Chasseneuil." And he added in an undertone: "Do you still doubt that scamp's guilt?"

"More than ever, uncle, I hope to prove to you——"

"Sergeant," at this moment said a gendarme, who had remained as sentry near the body. "I just now found this on the ground beside poor Michel," so saying, he produced a felt wad, exactly like the one which had already been found near the oak saplings.

"The two make a pair," said the sergeant. "Bring the prisoner away. I fancy that his case is clear by now."

"And I," muttered Julien in discouragement. "I really must be an utter fool, with my mania for exculpating criminals."

III.

WHILST the worthy priest of Charly took part, much against his will, in the proceedings connected with this tragical affair, his gossiping parishioner, Jacqueline Ledoux, also unwittingly experienced the influence of fate. Since the accident on the Place de la Bastille, she had not altogether regained her self-possession. Hitherto, as a rule, her thoughts had been mainly occupied in calculating the price her vegetables were likely to fetch at market, or what regulations the mayor of Charly would issue respecting the closing of wine shops.

This last matter only troubled her inasmuch as it affected the conduct of her husband, who was very partial to the potatoes retailed at the *Café du Grand Vainqueur*, the best patronised house in the whole locality. But the anonymous letter which had arrived very early that morning had greatly disturbed the good woman. Then she had experienced a deal of deception on seeing what a weak little beggar the officials at the Foundling Hospital had handed over to her in lieu of the strong, healthy child from whom she had hoped to take back to Charly. Moreover, as if to cap her misfortunes, the child's fall under the hoofs of M. Wassmann's horses had made her very blood curdle, as she expressed it in terms more forcible than elegant. The consoling good-fellowship of kind-hearted Antoine Corcier, the lucky meeting with M. Jean and his cordial language, failed to serve as compensation for her misfortunes and scares. Thus she was still very much disturbed in mind when she left the railway station and curtsied to the priest who did not take the same road to the village as herself.

Charly is composed of a long endless street, with houses on both sides, running in a straight line in a hollow between wooded slopes. To the left, if you come from Paris, these slopes are covered with dense woods, in fact an actual forest of many thousand acres, which stretches away into the department of Seine-and-Marne. To the right hand, the slopes rise but a short height above the Marne, and they are dotted over with plantations, standing amid patches of meadow-land.

At Charly almost all the houses on the left hand side of the road are occupied by petty townspeople and shopkeepers: while on the right hand, villas and châteaux follow without number, among them being that of Chasseneuil, the property of the Count de Blamont, who is the Marquis of Carabas of that part of the world, being sole owner of forest, plantations and meadows alike. The preference of the rich for the right hand side of the road is easily explained by the fact that it affords a magnificent view over the ever and terraced slopes of Ceuilly, rising up beyond the fertile plain of Villiers.

As for the public buildings of Charly, so far as the locality possesses such edifices, they are all stretched at one end of the village, that furthest from the railway station, and for this there is a very good reason, the little locality having sprung up piece-meal; as this lovely valley once uninhabited, gradually became full of houses, the church, municipal offices, and gendarmierie, were built last of all. The parsonage and church—the latter a pretty building of Byzantine style, designed by an architect, but recently retained from the French College at Rome—rise up on the very outskirts of the place, and seem to have been erected there on purpose to tempt lovers of retirement to come and build fresh houses further on and thus extend the limits of this charming locality. It is as if the local magnates said to passers-by, "Charly is only yet half built. Prolong it, gentlemen, so that our chief buildings may some day form its centre."

However, at the period we refer to, the passers-by had not taken the hint, so that in point of fact beyond the parsonage there was only one other building to be found, the so-called Pavillon des Sorbiers, a pretty villa in the Italian style, which for a year or so had been the abode of M. Wassmann, the wealthy foreigner, who owned such well-appointed equipages. This country house built, as a matter of course, on the aristocratic side of the road and over-looking the Marne, was situated some three or four hundred yards from the parsonage, so that when M. Wassmann drove to Paris in his eight-spring laudau, as was his wont every day, he had to

drive right through Charly at the brisk trot of his fine horses, those superb animals which so easily overturned children.

As it may well be imagined on that particular evening, this opulent individual had his place among the thoughts of Madame Ledoux as she strode down the long street of Charly dragging poor little Marcel by the hand. Still to do Jacqueline justice it must be admitted that her reflections concerning M. Wassmann were subordinate to her thoughts about her poor cousin Michel. This is why she hurried along with the praiseworthy object of repairing to the château as soon as she had taken the child home. The house of her husband, Pierre, was one of the first on entering the village—on the left hand side, of course, the side of the lower classes—and the market garden, where the industrious man forced his vegetables, extended to the outskirts of the forest. Thus the good woman had not far to go to reach home, but the question was whether she would find Pierre there so as to place Marcel in his charge, for she did not like to leave the child alone in his present state of exhaustion. It was, moreover, necessary to give her husband some explanations so as to induce him to accept the unfortunate gift of a sickly child.

As it happened, Monsieur Pierre, when once his day's work was over, never stayed at home, above all, in his wife's absence, but started off to have a game of billiards, instead of smoking his pipe in his orchard and gazing at the stars. The poor woman who was well acquainted with her husband's habits, had therefore good reasons for suspecting that she would have to hunt for him, and the search might hinder her from warning her cousin Michel as speedily as she wished to do. Unfortunately her fears were too well grounded, and when she at length reached home it was only to find the door locked. "He must certainly be at the Café du Grand Vainqueur," she muttered to herself, starting off again with a stout heart. Marcel, however, was now quite done up, hardly able to stand, and lacking even strength to speak. Fortunately the Grand Vainqueur was within a step—most publicans having elected to set up shop in that part of Charly nearest to the railway station. This particular café enjoyed the patronage of all the local magnates, and every native with any respect for himself, felt obliged to put in an appearance there at least once a day.

After many changes of fortune, the three first landlords having successively failed, the Grand Vainqueur had for the last ten months or so been kept by a certain Mademoiselle Rose, a staid spinster of pleasing manner and mature age; she was certainly quite in the forties. Where had she come from? To whom had she dedicated the springtide of her life? In what manner had she employed its summer? After what tempestuous heart throbs had she taken refuge behind a counter loaded with decanters of brandy and phials of the well-known liquor called "Perfect Love." No one in Charly knew anything precise about her. But people were well aware that she had paid ready money on taking over the business, and this was quite enough for the worthy citizens who patronised her establishment. Indeed very few of them had ever had the curiosity to inquire as to her surname—Mademoiselle Rose *was* Mademoiselle Rose—and no one asked more. Some people whispered she had met with misfortunes, but no one had tried to ascertain what her troubles had been. It seemed probable they were most undeserved ones, that is, judging by the imperturbable calmness and gentle resignation, with which she discharged her duties as landlady. Now Mademoiselle Rose not only enjoyed general sympathy, but she was favoured with the particular esteem of her neighbour, Madame Ledoux. Thanks to her, Jacqueline was kept well

maintained with her husband's expenditure, and willingly paid for the useful information, by the gift of sundry bunches of asparagus and baskets of berries. There had thus sprung up between the gardener's wife and the landlady an intimacy of sufficient strength for the exchange of mutual confidences, which almost always bore reference to the innumerable wrongs that the male species inflict upon the weaker sex. Impelled by her anxiety to reach the chateau, Jacqueline naturally decided to call on her way at the Grand Vainqueur, where she hoped to find her husband, and where at any rate she could confer with Mademoiselle Rose, who would no doubt willingly take temporary charge of Marcel, for she boasted that she was exceedingly fond of children. Being a spinster of ripe years, she was compelled to lavish her affections upon an elderly pug dog, and a gouty parrot; and never a day passed that she did not bemoan the fact that fate had deprived her of the joys of maternity. Jacqueline, who was similarly situated with regard to procreancy, tried to console her by saying that her's was at least an unmix'd evil, as she was at least spared being under the authority of a capricious husband. M. Ledoux would hardly have felt flattered, if he had heard his wife holding forth in this manner, but the two women only related their misfortunes in private. Full of confidence in Mademoiselle Rose's good will, Ledoux's wife took a few rapid strides, and reached the door of the café kept by the sensitive spinster. The Grand Vainqueur was generally remarkable for a glare of light, quite unusual elsewhere in Charly. But on this particular evening its glazed frontage was quite dim. The door was partially open: and by the feeble light of a solitary candle standing on a counter, Jacqueline saw the old maid mounted on a high stool, with her head and arms stretched upwards, busy over something, which so completely occupied her attention, that she neither saw nor heard the entrance of her friend. Thus, when she suddenly felt a slight pull at her dress, she gave a loud scream, and hurriedly leapt down from her pedestal. Had any one discovered her in the act of doctoring her customers' hot drinks with arsenic, she could not have evinced greater fright. "It's only me, Mam'zelle Rose," said Jacqueline, catching the sensitive landlady in her arms. "But good heavens! what's the matter with you, you are as white as a sheet?" "Excuse me, Madame Ledoux," stammered the spinster, "it is only—in what I didn't expect—I was surprised so. You understand what a start it gave me."

"Yes, a fine one, and had I not caught hold of you, you would have fallen flat on the floor. It was my fault, however, I ought to have called out to you, but I didn't think you were so easily frightened."

"You know quite well, neighbour, that I am very easily upset, especially when I have one of my nervous attacks. I have been suffering from one ever since yesterday to such a degree that I hardly know what I am about."

"And that's the reason you amuse yourself by climbing on a high stool to dust your clock in the dark. What a queer idea!"

"The clock!" retorted Mademoiselle Rose, who still seemed greatly disturbed. "No, you are quite mistaken, it was nothing to do with the clock, it was to kill a big spider. I have a perfect horror of spiders, and then I am ten times afraid of thieves, so when I felt a hand touch my dress, I was thoroughly scared. You know how many bad characters from Paris come prowling about here at dusk, and when a woman happens to be all alone—well, you can fancy I did not feel comfortable."

"As if there were any sense in not lighting your lamps earlier?"

"Oh, I don't like to burn oil to no purpose? Now that the fine weather has set in, the gentlemen come here rather late, and it's only a quarter past eight as yet."

"Oh! it's surely later than that, why I took the five minutes past seven train, and the time to walk here from the station——"

"I assure you I just heard the quarter strike," said Mademoiselle Rose, whose voice still shook a trifle.

"Then I must have walked faster than I thought, but that's not what I wanted to ask you. I have a lot to tell you, Mademoiselle Rose. Oh, if you only knew everything that has happened to me this very day!"

"What is it, good heavens?" stammered the old maid.

"I will tell you later on; at present I have only time to rush off if I want to find Michel, besides my husband is not here."

"I saw him pass not twenty minutes ago with a large bouquet he was taking up to the Pavillon des Sorbiers."

"Then he won't be back yet awhile, and if you would take charge of this little fellow here while I go and do my errands you would do me an immense favour."

"Oh, good heavens! I hadn't noticed the little cherub," exclaimed Mademoiselle Rose, "the candle gives such a bad light and then my nerves; and where does he come from, the little dear?"

"From the Foundling Hospital, worse luck. That's the sort of boy they expect me to turn into a gardener. I am sure I don't know how Ledoux will take it, not to speak of the bother I have had already with the little chap; would you believe it, he fell under the wheels of a carriage on the Place de la Bastille, and it was the very carriage that belongs to the gentleman who lives at the Pavillon des Sorbiers."

"Monsieur Wassmann?" asked the spinster.

"Yes, the wealthy German, and upon my word, I am half glad it happened as it did, considering he has promised to come and see the child to-night. I have an idea that he will pay up handsomely. That's why I don't want to be away too long, for a hundred crowns or so are not to be despised, and this gentleman can't offer much less, considering the fright we had."

"You think so?" asked Mademoiselle Rose, who evidently did not have a high opinion of M. Wassmann's generosity.

"Certainly, I think so, and what would there be so astonishing in his putting down say three hundred francs, a millionaire like him? But I am chattering away like a magpie," continued Jacqueline, "and all this time my poor Michel goes in danger of his life. It's agreed, isn't it, you'll take care of this little fellow till I return?"

"Willingly—but——"

"Don't alarm yourself, I shan't be gone long, you will see how good he is. Oh, by the bye, if my husband should come in before I return, don't tell him this is the child I have brought back, it might irritate him for the moment, I'd rather tell him about it myself." And thereupon not waiting for a reply from her fellow gossip, the impetuous Jacqueline rushed out into the street leaving Mademoiselle Rose alone with Marcel.

The poor little fellow had seated himself on a bench on entering the café, and during this long contabulation he had not once opened his mouth. He remained motionless in a corner of the room, silent and apparently quite indifferent to all that went on around him, but neither stupefied nor asleep, for his big black eyes which sparkled with intelligence, wandered eagerly from the old maid in her faded silk gown, to some coloured engravings on

wall, setting forth the history of Prince Poniatowski. Perhaps the degree of admiration with which these splendours inspired him served to lighten him as well.

Rather perplexed by her temporary maternity, but half recovered from the fright which Madame Lecloux's abrupt arrival had caused her, Madame Rose hardly knew what to say to this child, who seemed to have fallen from the clouds. She tried hard to make him talk, but being unable to draw any thing out of him, notwithstanding her tempting offers of odd lumps of sugar, she ceased coaxing him, and having seated him on a little chair beside the counter, she resumed her preparations for the evening's business. With her own hands she lighted the lamps, wiped the tables, refilled the partially emptied decanters, and when she had set everything to rights in the big room of the Grand Vainqueur, she returned sadly to her manogany throne. Was it because her faithful customers so long delayed their arrival, that she appeared pre-occupied and ill at ease? Was she thinking bitterly of old love affairs? of lovers passed far out of reach? It would have required great cleverness to guess. One thing is certain, she often gave a nervous start, and still oftener glanced at the clock behind her. The little boy, with that spirit of imitation which children and monkeys habitually evince, likewise watched the hand's moving round the enamelled dial of the old time-piece, and appeared to listen wonderingly to the tic tac of the pendulum.

A murmur of voices soon announced the approach of the frequenters of the establishment, and they were not long in making their appearance. There were four of them, all people of importance, and for different reasons held in high esteem. First came M. Vétillet, a retired hosier who had made his fortune, and was now assessor to the mayor of the locality; then followed Cruchot, the veterinary surgeon, and Verduron, the huissier, two big wigs. Behind them appeared Digomnard, the chemist, who boasted great ability and universal knowledge, and who was as celebrated for his witicisms as for his profound learning and high political aims. He was, so to say, the life and soul of the party which met every evening at the Grand Vainqueur, and his constant trips to Paris, secured him an important position in this very select company. Digomnard never passed "the city walls," as he expressed it, without going to see the plays which were drawing at the theatres, and he even declared that he associated with the journalists of the capital, so that he always returned home well posted in scandalous stories and exciting bits of news. The only thing was that these expeditions highly displeased Madame Digomnard, who was of a very jealous disposition. It is true she could not speak her mind before her husband's friends, as she was obliged to take his place at the shop while the convivial gatherings of these gentlemen were going on; however, she made up for it when the café was closed.

It precisely happened that the distinguished chemist had arrived from Paris that very afternoon and had come back with a much graver air than usual. By the very way in which he pursed up his lips it was easy to see that if he remained silent it was not because he lacked interesting information, but on the contrary, because he knew more than he cared to tell. Neither Vétillet, nor Cruchot, nor even Verduron, had succeeded in unravelling the mystery; and he had arrived at the Grand Vainqueur with

A huissier is a member of the French legal profession charged with drawing up and serving various deeds, such as writs, summonses, copies of judgments, with protesting promissory notes, seizing goods and chattels, &c., &c. For convenience's sake the character in the present story is elsewhere called the "lawyer."—*Trans.*

an overclouded brow To the gracious salutations with which Mademoiselle Rose especially favoured him he only responded by a friendly patronising nod, as if he were afraid of compromising himself by wishing her good evening. His reserved manner seemed likely to cast a chill over the gathering, and the poor spinster, already full of anxiety, was on the point of giving way to her emotion when the lawyer espied the child seated close beside the counter. From a long course of habit, Verduron never went out anywhere without taking stock of both furniture and owners. However motionless Mareel remained, puny as he was, he could not avoid the lawyer's searching glance. "Hullo!" exclaimed M. Verduron, "where the deuce did that urchin come from? I say, Mademoiselle Rose, you are surely not going to open a school for little boys?"

"Do you happen to be a god-mother, fair lady?" asked the old hosier, who always would have his joke.

"Gentlemen," said the old maid somewhat sharply, "your jests are much out of place. It is a child that Madame Ledoux brought home from the Foundling Asylum this evening, and she has left him with me while she went on an errand."

"Indeed! but why didn't you say so at once?" muttered Cruchot, the veterinary surgeon.

"Madame Ledoux!" exclaimed Verduron. "The child was left here by Madame Ledoux?"

"Quite so, and I am waiting for her to come and fetch him."

"Then you will have to wait a good time for her. You evidently don't know what has happened to her?"

"Good heavens! she surely has not fallen into the hole in front of old Founard's shop, has she? The sergeant told him ages ago to put a lantern in front of his door, the wretched old rag-merchant that he is!"

"It's nothing to do with old Founard," retorted lawyer Verduron, "Jacqueline met her husband on the way to Chasseneuil—I do not know where he was coming from, but he was as drunk as a fish."

"Can it be true? He who is so perfectly steady!"

"Yes, a fine fellow who can swallow his half-dozen glasses without the least discomfort. He must have been given something rather stiff to drink. I fancy he must have gone to the Pavillon des Sorbiers with some flowers, and that the servants of that wealthy German plied him with Kirschwasser or schnaps."

Mademoiselle Rose, who had seen the gardener go by carrying a big bouquet, was doubtless of the same opinion as the lawyer for she made no rejoinder.

"Well," added Verduron, "it is easy to guess what happened. Jacqueline scuffled with him, he resisted, and I should not be surprised to hear that he had beaten her. At all events there was a crowd in the street, but the oddest thing of all is, that Madame Ledoux who had been the first to pounce down upon him, then absolutely wished to hurry off. She shrieked out like a fiend that she had business up at the château, that she wanted to speak to her cousin Michel. The more she screamed and more she struggled, however, the more strongly her husband clung to her skirt."

"And he prevented her going?" asked the old maid, who appeared interested in the narrative.

"No doubt! Jacqueline can scarcely have proved the stronger of the two."

"I say," insinuated the assessor Vétillet, who ever since his arrival had stared closely at Mareel, "Jacqueline isn't yet out of the wood? At any rate

when Ledoux comes in and sees what an undersized brat she has brought him, I fancy he won't be over pleased; and if he is still in liquor, his wife will have a bad time of it."

"Let's have a look at the child," said the chemist, stepping in a self-satisfied manner towards Marcel, who was still crouching in his corner. "Good," the vendor of drugs continued, as soon as he had glanced at the urchin's face. "I know what's the matter: it's as plain as possible. Scrofulous diathesis and rachitis. He needs steel and quinquina."

"To be obtained from your pharmacy, eh? But I don't advise you to count on that patient, my dear Digonnard," sneered the lawyer, "old Ledoux will say that his house is not an hospital, and he will send the little chap back to the authorities."

"That would, perhaps, be a pity," put in Cruchot, the veterinary surgeon. "The little urchin has a sharp look, and I'll warrant that something can be made out of him."

"Gentlemen," exclaimed the assessor Vétillet, jestingly, "we haven't come here to waste our time. Come, let us make up a four-handed game of dominoes. You gentlemen owe me my revenge."

"And me too," said Verduron. "Come, Mademoiselle Rose, two pots of beer, four glasses, and twenty-eight dominoes, sharp!"

The elderly spinster listened to wait upon her patrons, who seated themselves at a round table, where every evening they fought out an exciting game. As a rule, however, they let politics take precedence of play, and before they furiously rattled the little cubes of bone and wood combined, they expressed opinions on the state of Europe in general, and that of France in particular—opinions, which, although delivered in a familiar manner were none the less of great weight. However, on that particular evening, they all four seemed to have agreed to abandon the abstruse subject of the government of empires. They tossed for sides, and fate made the chemist and lawyer partners against the vet. and the assessor. This distribution of places inspired Digonnard with the remark that fate had wedded science to law. The game commenced, and, meanwhile, Mademoiselle Rose fidgetted behind the counter, as if she had been sitting on red hot coals. Every now and then the pen she used to enter the day's receipts remained in mid-air, poised between her fingers, and from time to time large blots of ink fell upon her ledger. She constantly wiped her forehead with her handkerchief, and every three minutes she raised her eyes to the dial of the clock, one of those tall wooden timepieces that work by means of weights hanging in a case, and the shape, of which, in a degree, recalls the antique statues of the Termini deities. One could have sworn that Mademoiselle Rose was expecting some body. "My game!" called suddenly out the chemist, triumphantly putting down his last domino. "Dash it all?" growled Vétillet, "if it hadn't been for you the game was mine."

"Too late, paterfamilias, too late! You know the proverb: *Tarde venientibus ossa*."

"Hallo! there he goes talking Greek again," said the ex-hosier. "That ought to be forbidden while we are playing."

"In the first place it's Latin and not Greek."

"All right, all right, either that or German or Auvergnat, it's all the same to me—shuffle the dominoes a bit better. The double six always comes over to my side."

"Your turn to begin play, Digonnard," said Verduron.

"All right, I play double blank."

"Dash it all, you always have the blanks."

"Blank five," said Vétillet.

Several dominoes were played in swift succession amid jokes and jeers, and finally Cruchot exclaimed, "Hallo! six everywhere. Come, Digonnard, play up."

"I can't, I haven't any sixes."

"And you Vétillet?"

"I haven't any either."

"Nor I," exclaimed Verduron, "It's a queer go; the game's blocked."

"Sixty-six to forty-nine!" announced the lawyer after counting the scores.

"And so my side loses again," sighed Vétillet. "I shall have to fork out ninepence as I did yesterday."

"Well! it won't kill you, a monied man like you!" said the chemist.

"A monied man indeed! not half so rich as you, you gain five hundred per cent. profit on your drugs. The other day you sold me a draught for my youngest boy, and charged me a franc and a-half for it. Now I've been told it cost you just a fifth part of that amount, bottle included!"

"What of it? You are not aware perhaps that chemical products, unlike those used in hosiery, fluctuate in value from day to day, and that a man must be careful to be on the safe side!"

"Come, come! no more of that! let's have a return game of 150 up," interrupted Verduron.

"Not if I know it, I am not going to ruin myself!"

"All right then, let's stop there," said Digonnard rather sharply; "besides, I have other matters to think of besides that of winning a jugful of beer."

"Very well, gentlemen," said the veterinary surgeon by way of summing up, "let us do like the manager of the Meaux theatre, who wished to play the opera of the "Dame Blanche" and who had no orchestra."

"Well, what did this Meaux manager do?" asked the retired hosier.

"He announced on his playbill that the music would be replaced by a lively and animated dialogue. So I propose that we should have an equally animated conversation instead of playing dominoes."

"What a humbug Cruchot is!" sneered Verduron.

"Not such an humbug, pray! Look here, I feel sure that Digonnard has brought a pot of news back with him from Paris, and if he would only speak——"

"Yes, but I won't," said the chemist pompously.

"Pooh! is it so very serious, eh?" cried the three other players in chorus.

"So serious that I would not even tell it to my little finger, and besides it concerns some people of Charly, and I don't like scandal-mongering."

"I'll bet that it's something to do with the new priest."

"Speaking about him," resumed Vétillet, "have you ever met him in Paris! It is said he often goes there."

"I don't even know him by sight as he has never crossed the threshold of my laboratory," replied Digonnard scornfully.

"But your shop is close to the church, and you won't make me believe——"

"You know that I never go to church; and that my opinions prevent my doing so."

"Pooh! they did not prevent you selling drugs to the late priest during his illness, and even making a lot of money out of them;" retorted Vétillet, who had taken his loss at dominoes to heart.

"Gentlemen, this isn't the question!" remarked the lawyer. "Let us return to our friend Digomard's news. If it doesn't concern the priest I can only suggest Monsieur Wassmann."

"The German who has rented the Pavillon des Sorbiers!" exclaimed Cruchot. "That's quite possible after all. There's something very strange about that gentleman."

"Come, my dear Digomard, are we on the right scent?" asked Verduron. "You are very hot!" solemnly replied the chemist, who was really dying to speak.

"Then be a good fellow, and don't keep us in suspense."

Digomard, moved by these flattering entreaties, leant on his elbows and was about to commence his story when the door of the café abruptly opened.

"Hullo!" said the lawyer, "speak of an angel, and you can see his wings."

Never was the truth of a proverb better exemplified, for the person who had entered was none other than the wealthy tenant of the Pavillon des Sorbiers, M. Wassmann in person. This was probably the first time since his arrival at Charly, that he had set foot in the Café du Grand Vainqueur. And it is almost needless to add that his appearance caused a tremendous sensation. Digomard, who had been on the point of telling his story, sat gaping with amazement. The lawyer, who had certainly never served any writs upon the rich foreigner, tried to assume an air of mingled dignity and grace. The veterinary surgeon, who had one day had the honour of bleeding one of the dark bay carriage horses, felt himself called upon to rise up and bow to the animal's owner. Vetillet, the ex-hosier, always respected wealth in the person of those who possessed it, but he also coveted it, and thus it happened that his sallow face wore an expression of humility, spoilt by a certain ironical grin. As for Mademoiselle Rose, it was quite another matter. She first turned white, then grew as scarlet as a poppy, and was seized with a nervous trembling, which made her split her pen on her ledger. She was evidently quite confused by the unexpected honour that M. Wassmann conferred upon her by visiting her modest establishment.

Marcel alone had remained utterly unmoved by the great event, for it really was an event, to see this proud and opulent personage in such a place. The only person of Charly to whom this haughty foreigner condescended to bow when he met him in the street, was the Count de Brannes, who, by the way, returned the said bow very coldly. As for the licensed dealers and shopkeepers of the place, he never held any communication with them, save through the channel of his servants, who all of them came from the Rhine, and were almost as stiff as their master. It was, therefore, something prodigious to see M. Wassmann turn up among the domino players, something almost like the appearance of Jupiter on his descent from Olympus, and it was necessary to be a child not to be dazzled by the deity's awful majesty. Childhood, however, has no respect for social grandeur, and the little founding failed to show the slightest emotion in the presence of this imposing grandee, although he immediately recognised him, as could be seen by the manner in which he looked at him.

It should be added that this German Jove had left all his thunderbolts at the Pavillon des Sorbiers, and that there was nothing alarming about his entry. He favoured the customers of the Grand Vainqueur with a slight nod, went straight to the counter, and condescended so far as to touch the brim of his hat before addressing Mademoiselle Rose.

"Madame," he said in a fairly polite manner, and without displaying the

slightest German accent, "Do you happen to know the wife of a gardener named Ledoux?"

"Yes, sir, yes, certainly I do," stammered the old maid, "Jacqueline Ledoux is my near neighbour; she lives at the end of the lane."

"Then it was all right," resumed M. Wassmann; "I have just knocked at the door and could get no answer."

"Jacqueline was here a few minutes ago, sir, but——."

"Ah yes, she told me, I think, that if she was not at home, I should find her at this tavern."

Mademoiselle Rose would certainly never have allowed anyone else to apply the word tavern to the most noted café in Charly, but it is possible that the Sorbiers millionaire intimidated her a good deal, for she did not dare to breath a word. The domino players, wounded in their self-esteem, felt a thrill of indignation at this insult, but they did not openly resent it. "I am greatly surprised that this woman did not wait for me," said the foreigner, somewhat sharply.

"She has gone on an errand to the château, I think, sir."

"To the Count de Brannes?"

"Yes, sir, she wished to speak to her cousin Michel, who is keeper of the Chasseneuil woods."

"That's nothing to me," interrupted M. Wassmann with a truly Olympian scowl, "I only want to know if she is coming back, for I wish to speak to her at once."

"Oh, sir, it won't be long before Jacqueline comes back now, and if you would wait——."

"No thank you," said the foreigner throwing a glance around him, which clearly implied that the velvet-covered benches of the Grand Vainqueur were not more attractive to him than the company of the Charly magnates.

"The gentleman's right," remarked Dignonard, who was never frightened for long when in presence of the "great ones of the earth," "It is not at all certain that Madame Ledoux will come back yet awhile, for she is wrangling with her husband, so in this gentleman's place——."

"After all," continued M. Wassmann, without taking the slightest notice of the chemist, it is not absolutely necessary for me to see this woman, and if you will only undertake to deliver a message to her——."

"Anything you like, sir," eagerly answered Mademoiselle Rose.

"This is what I wanted to say. While I was in Paris this afternoon my horses knocked over a child that this woman, Ledoux, was bringing to Charly. He was not hurt, only very much frightened, but I want to indemnify him for the slight accident. So I took the woman's address and decided to call on her myself."

"Oh, yes, sir, and she quite expected you, for she brought the little fellow to me, begging me to take care of him till she returned," exclaimed the old maid, pointing to Marcel, who still remained motionless in his corner.

"Yes, indeed, it seems to me that this is the lad," replied M. Wassmann coldly, "so it is quite superfluous for me to wait here. Come, here are five hundred francs, my boy," he added, placing a roll of gold in Marcel's hands, "They will help you to buy an outfit, as you don't need any medicine."

"One can never be sure of that," said Dignonard, who always pricked his ears when it was a question of medicine. "A fright may have serious consequences let alone bruises, to which arnica should be applied."

"Madame," resumed the generous foreigner, "will you please tell this man Lecloux, that I shall always feel interested in this poor little fellow, and that if she has any thing to ask of me, I give her permission to write."
 "I will not fail to do so, sir," said Mademoiselle Rose, "but Jacqueline would have been highly pleased to have seen and thanked you in person."
 M. Wassmann, touched no doubt by the wish which the spinster thus pressed in her friend's name, appeared to hesitate for a moment. "What clock is it?" he muttered, drawing a magnificent watch from his waistcoat pocket.

"Five minutes past nine," replied Mademoiselle Rose, after consulting the dial of the old clock.

"No, exactly nine o'clock," corrected the foreigner, looking at his chronometer. "But it is of no consequence, I cannot wait any longer. I wish you good evening; good-bye little man," he added, lightly patting the cheek of the foundling who remained calm and silent, with his big eyes fixedly staring and his little hands full of gold. Thereupon giving a slight farewell nod to the old maid, M. Wassmann walked out without taking any more notice of the four natives of the village than if he had been hovering a mid-air, while they grovelled in the dust.

Scarcely had he gone off than the conversation, interrupted by his presence, was renewed with increased vigour. "Whatever made people say he was so hard on the poor?" exclaimed Verduron.

"And such a screw!" said Cruchot.

"He must be pretty rich, any ways, to put down five hundred francs like that," grumbled Vétillet, rising to inspect Marcel's treasure more closely.

"Hum, all that glitters is not gold," said the chemist, with a knowing wink. "Is not that true, Mademoiselle Rose?"

"What did you say?" asked Mademoiselle Rose, starting on her chair like a woman abruptly roused from sleep.

"Well, ain't there all sorts of reports about this Monsieur Wassmann?" continued Dignonard.

"I'm not aware of anything at all; I don't know him."

"Nor I either, nor any one else in Charly, and it is precisely that which excites one's suspicions."

"Suspicious—suspicious—why so?" asked the veterinary surgeon, who was always well disposed towards people who had six horses in their stable.

"Why, because I defy you to tell me where he comes from, and what he is up to here, and how he made his money," replied the ex-hosier.

"I'll bet one thing, he didn't make it selling socks," said the facetious Verduron.

"That'll do, I know what to think," muttered the chemist.

"Look here, Dignonard," resumed the lawyer, "don't be so mysterious, it is easy to guess you have learnt a lot about him in Paris."

"That's quite possible, but what I *have* heard, I mean to keep to myself!"

"Pooh! you were just going to tell us all about it when the German swell came in."

"Yes. Out with it, Dignonard," urged Vétillet and Cruchot.

"Well," said the chemist, who had allowed himself to be pressed merely for appearance' sake. "Just fancy, I had been to breakfast at one of Duval's restaurants this morning, and as I came out round myself face to face with Monsieur Wassmann, who was dressed, you would never guess how——"

"As a Turk? As a policeman?" asked the lawyer, who was always full of banter.

"No, something more curious than that, as a servant, gentlemen! Yes as a chasseur attached! to some nobleman's household, with a green livery, and a hat with feathers in it!"

"What nonsense!"

"It is perfectly true, and the most astounding part of it all is that——"

It was without doubt written in the Book of Fate that Digonnard should never finish his story, for just as he was reaching the most interesting part the abrupt and noisy entry of Jacqueline Ledoux cut him short. "Ah good heavens!" exclaimed the market-gardener's wife, sweeping into the room like a hurricane, "Ah! Mademoiselle Rose, what a terrible misfortune! My poor Michel, they have murdered him! I arrived too late!"

The domino players started up in wild alarm, and as for Mademoiselle Rose she fainted right away.

IV.

TOWARDS noon on the morrow of this eventful day, breakfast had just concluded at the Château of Chasseneuil, and as may well be imagined the repast had not been a merry one. M. de Brannes was very fond of his gamekeeper Michel, and the tragical fate of the poor old soldier had deeply affected him. With the real and poignant grief he felt was mingled the natural anxiety of a landlord, irritated by the constant misdeeds of the poaching fraternity whose depredations extended through all the surrounding country, and bound by his position to do all he could to put a stop to them. The murderer had been caught red-handed, at least everything pointed to that conclusion, and it was absolutely necessary to make an example of him; it was imperative that one should collect such overwhelming evidence against him as to prevent any scandalous acquittal such as had already taken place more than once with other rascals of his kind.

The count had made up his mind to do everything that lay in his power to promote the interests of justice, although he experienced a certain natural repugnance at being mixed up in an affair of the kind. M. de Brannes was fifty years of age; he possessed a large fortune, and held a high position in the best society; resolute and upright he was of a generous though somewhat prejudiced disposition. In his perplexity an idea suddenly occurred to him. His nephew, Julien de la Chanterie, his sister's son, left an orphan at an early age, and since attaining his majority the absolute master of an income of some thirty thousand francs, had taken it into his head to become an advocate, not merely in view of securing a diploma, but with the full intention of pleading at the bar. The count had strongly disapproved of this whim, for he considered that if a man of noble birth did not serve in the army he ought to confine himself to improving his estates. His son, Henri de Brannes, had studied at the military school of Saint Cyr, and was now a staff-captain and would continue serving until it pleased him to resign to marry some wealthy aristocratic damsel; and Julien on his side might very well have chosen the military career. However, the master of Chasseneuil was not over hard on the young lawyer; there were even days when he forgave him what he called his misdeemeanour, as he indeed did on the present occasion. Julien was at hand to undertake what he, the count, could not, or would not do, and indeed the young fellow would be more than willing to follow up this criminal case, for he was partial to clearing up intricate questions, and moreover he had especial reasons for wishing to please his uncle.

Gabrielle de Brannes occupied most of Julien de la Chanterie's thoughts, though he did not see her as often as he could have wished : and she was wholly dependent on her father, who was a widower, and who, having recently removed her from the convent school, where she had been educated, would probably soon select a husband for her.

The count had clearly perceived that his nephew was much smitten with Mademoiselle de Brannes, and if he did not give him much encouragement, at any rate did nothing to dishearten him. Taken altogether, Julien would in his eyes be a very eligible suitor, that is, providing he cast his sword's profession to the dogs, and pleased Gabrielle.

M. de Brannes could certainly lay claim to such assistance as came within the scope of Julien's profession, and he did not fail to do so : indeed, it was his intention that, on the evening of the murder, he had invited him breakfast at the chateau the next day. The young man had hastily taken leave of his hunting associates, and had arrived at Chasseneuil in a costume which nowise recalled the strange get-up of Brave Buffalo, the Red Indian. Julien de la Chanterie's partiality for the blood profession had not interfered with his naturally polished habits and distinguished bearing. Indeed, in associating with other members of his profession, he had acquired a sprightly and lively expression, in which many young noblemen of the day were deficient. From his father, a gallant and valorous knight under the walls of Brest, he had inherited more energy and courage ; and from his mother, so delicate while yet young, an exceedingly susceptible heart. He was tall and slim, with a frank open countenance, a dark complexion, fine brown eyes, teeth of dazzling whiteness, and an easy graceful bearing. Had Mademoiselle de Brannes noticed his good looks ? There were strong reasons to think so, but reasons which it would be difficult to explain or enumerate : still they had not escaped the keen eyes of the Count de Brannes. Her liking for her cousin was suddenly noticeable by some suddenly developed energy for eloquence, which led her to read the speeches of such an orator as Mirabeau, who, one can well imagine, was not favourably looked upon at the Chateau of Chasseneuil. At times too, she would leave a little bouquet, which she had worn on her dress-bodice, on the table, so that M. de la Chanterie might appropriate it, and turn it into a keepsake. But, on the other hand, Julien was sorely distressed by the fact that when Mademoiselle Gabrielle was in his company, she would talk of nothing but the valiant deeds of their mutual ancestors in the Holy Land, regretting the disputations warlike centuries, when a noble only appeared in helmet and breastplate, crying his lance ; and pitilessly scolding at the commonplace existence led by young noblemen of the present day. Sometimes she did not hesitate to declare that she would never marry any one but some valiant knight, who would undertake some thing glorious on her sake, such as going to the heart of Africa in search of Livingstone, the explorer, or discovering the North Pole, or at least killing one or two dozen tigers ! M. de Brannes merely smiled at these flights of imagination, but Julien, who saw no likelihood of being able to hunt tigers in India, or white bears at Spitzbergen, flattered horribly. Still he put a good face on the matter, when exposed to such storms ; and weakly protested that he wished nothing better than to devote himself for his cousin, and that it was not his fault if modern times were so ill adapted to hazardous expeditions and glorious feats of arms. In the main, he knew very well what to think of the whims and tempers of the spoiled child who delighted in teasing him. Gabrielle had a noble mind

and a most generous heart. Why shouldn't she love a man who adored her and who went his way so bravely? And then, she was so pretty! Her aristocratic beauty lacked the radiance and regularity which compel admiration; she could not lay claim to the worship of the multitude; to appreciate her at her full worth it was necessary to have a refined mind. But with her graceful figure, queenly bearing, magnificent light brown hair, deep blue eyes, eyes which carried language in their glance, she captivated every one who is sensible to that indescribable gift called fascination. The people of the neighbourhood, however, alleged she had a proud disposition, and was wanting in colour.

On the morning referred to, Mademoiselle de Brannes seemed particularly inclined to contradict her cousin. During breakfast nothing was discussed but the direful events of the previous night, and she listened with deep attention to the touching account of Michel's death and the poacher's arrest. However, she remained silent, which was quite an unusual occurrence with her, and it was easy to see that the sad particulars had greatly affected her. Julien also divined that her excitable mind had been impressed by the mystery enveloping the whole affair, and that, despite herself, she was interested in the man accused of the crime, or, perhaps, in his unhappy wife. He was quite disposed to share her feelings in this respect, but he stood alone in his impartial view of the case, for M. de Brannes was greatly incensed by the murder of his keeper, and his son Henri took it for granted that the individual called Robert was guilty. The young captain had just reached home on a few days' furlough, being attracted to the château by his liking for the pleasures of country life, and maybe by the proximity of a certain country house, past which he intentionally rode once or twice a day. He had been very fond of Michel, under whose supervision he had in former years bagged his first partridge, and the news of the keeper's death had exasperated him to such a degree, that he expressed a regret that he had not been on the spot to blow out the murderer's brains. The breakfast party adjourned to the garden as soon as the meal was over, the gentlemen being partial to a smoke in the shady garden walks, where the count finished explaining to Julien what he expected of him. He had no difficulty in obtaining a promise that he, Julien, would follow up the case, and put himself at the magistrate's service to bring the inquiry to an issue, and convict the guilty man. This being decided, M. de Brannes took his son by the arm, being desirous of remonstrating with him about some private peccadillo, and then went off, leaving Julien to his own reflections. Young La Chauterie was walking dejectedly up and down the garden, when suddenly he felt a light hand touch his shoulder, and on turning he found himself face to face with Gabrielle.

"Would you like to do something to please me?" asked the young girl abruptly. "You would, wouldn't you? Very well, then you must just help me to prove that this poacher is innocent."

Julien hardly expected any sort of request from his cousin and certainly not this one. He had certainly fancied that Mademoiselle de Brannes sympathised with the poacher's wife, and perhaps went as far as to pity the poacher himself. But that the enthusiastic young girl believed in the man's innocence and wished to ensure his acquittal was a thing which had never entered the young lawyer's head. Strange, however, as such a desire appeared to him, he would willingly have tried to carry it into effect; indeed he would have lent himself with delight to the realisation of his wildest fancies, but the question at issue was a most delicate one. Gabrielle

st arrived at the precise moment that he had pledged himself to M. de la Chauterie in a contrary sense. The father wished for his help to bring about Robert's condemnation, while the daughter wanted the poacher. Julien was thus thrown into a terrible state of perplexity. Which should he take? Whom should he obey? The disregard of his promise to his uncle would probably lead to an irrevocable quarrel with him; while to refuse would be worse still if he refused to please his cousin, in fact, it would be compromising his dearest hopes.

Mlle. de Brannes, with her inconsiderate nature, having so lately become enthusiastic about the problematic innocence of a thoroughbred, was quite capable of resenting a refusal, and of having nothing more to say to M. de la Chauterie. To make matters worse, he must answer at once, and to the point, for he knew by experience that Gabrielle did not like hesitation or evasion. However, he tried to gain time by answering the inquiry with a fresh question. "You are interested in this unhappy man?" he slowly said.

"Doubtless, as I ask you to defend him," said the girl without showing the least embarrassment.

"You know very well, Gabrielle, that I am always ready to comply with your wishes," answered Julien in his tenderest fashion; "but I implore you to tell me how the fate of a man, accused of such an abominable murder, can possibly affect you."

"Wrongly accused!" asserted Mlle. de Brannes.

"What makes you think so?"

"I have seen his wife, whom my father has lodged at the château, and she swore to me that her husband was not guilty."

"But she loves him, could you expect her doing anything else than trying to save him?"

"Then you think we may be deceived in those we love?" said Gabrielle, looking at her cousin with her large blue eyes, which reflected all the simplicity and loyalty of her eighteen summers. Julien vainly tried to resist that look. "No," he stammered. "No, undoubtedly; I myself was struck by the truthful tone in which he protested his innocence. I recollect, moreover, that the poacher at the moment of his arrest, gave his explanations with calmness and confidence, which made a great impression on me, but since then—"

"Well, what has happened since then?"

"Proofs have accumulated against him."

"What proofs?"

"Proofs of every kind unfortunately. The summary inquiry, at which my uncle and I were present, contradicted the statements made by the accused man. I can't enter into all the horrible particulars with you, discuss the circumstances of Michel's terrible wound, or the finding of the body so close to his dead body; still I assure you that I was most anxious to see the poacher free of any doubt, and I swear it to you I can no longer do so. Your father's convictions are as deeply rooted as my own, and I only just now he asked me—in fact he made me promise——"

"What?"

"He made me promise to take his place in pressing forward the inquiries," cried Julien, who was anxious to arrive at this avowal and forego all the entreaties of his captivating cousin.

Gabrielle blushed and vainly tried to hide a slight gesture of impatience, but she did not reply at once. For an instant, the young lawyer, indeed

thought that his last shot had gone home; however, Mademoiselle de Brannes made a gentle reply speedily undeceived him.

"You speak of overwhelming evidence; it seemed to me, however, that there were certain circumstances quite in the man's favour. Wasn't he arrested while he was fishing for cray-fish in the Marne, in view of selling them to some persons pic-nicing in a tent on the river-bank?"

"Why—I—I hardly know," stammered Julien, dismayed on discovering that M. de Brannes had revealed everything.

"What!" exclaimed Gabrielle, pitilessly, "you don't remember that there was quite a gathering of boating men there?"

"Yes, it's true—I had forgotten it!"

The wretched lover wished himself at the bottom of the river, for there was nothing he so dreaded as his cousin becoming acquainted with the circumstances of this hare-brained expedition. "And so," continued the young girl archly, "since your memory is returning to you, you will agree with me, that a murderer would have absconded at once, instead of quietly settling down to fish within a few hundred paces of the wood?"

"It is indeed likely he would have done so," muttered the unfortunate La Chanterie.

"Well, it seems to me, if you are unwilling to undertake the man's defence, as I have begged you, you might, at least, communicate with the people, and beg them to give evidence in his favour."

"But it would, perhaps, be rather difficult."

"Why, there was a large party, I hear, several men and women."

"Gabrielle! I swear to you——"

"Stop a minute! I have been told they gave themselves extraordinary names; that will, perhaps, assist you in any inquiries you make. For instance, one of them called himself—What was it? Ah, I have it! The—yes, the Buffalo!"

Mademoiselle de Brannes had not time to add anything more, for Julien broke in with the exclamation: "Gabrielle, I will do every mortal thing you wish!"

"That's all right!" said the young girl laughing, "I knew I should succeed by winning you over to my side!" And then she continued, but in a much graver manner. "You are doing the right thing now, Julien, don't think for a moment that I want you to act contrary to your convictions: no, I only beg of you to ascertain the truth, the plain truth, without being influenced by other peoples' opinions, or discouraged by appearances, for I believe absolutely in the innocence of that poor woman's husband——!"

"May you be right," murmured Julien, more in love and less convinced than ever.

"And," continued Gabrielle, "I am certain that Providence will assist you in establishing his innocence!"

"What are you two plotting together at this moment?" said M. de Brannes, suddenly coming upon the young people at a turn of the garden walk.

"Why, what should we talk about but this sad business," said Gabrielle quickly, so as to get her cousin out of the difficulty in which he was placed.

"But where has my brother gone?" she added.

"Henri just left me to go for a ride. It is absolutely folly in the heat of the noontide sun; but for the last fortnight he has simply gone mad over riding, and riding on the high roads too!"

Gabrielle smiled, for she knew perfectly well why the captain preferred the road which ran past the Pavillon des Sorbiers.

Well, let him take as much as he likes," continued the count. "We are unfortunately under other anxieties just now, and you must enter upon your duties at once, my dear nephew. The sergeant of gendarmes and the doctor are coming. I also expect a visit from the priest, and probably one from the examining magistrate, who is to arrive from Paris. The inquiry will be finished this evening I suppose, and I really shan't be sorry, for all these painful details quite upset me. Ah! I forgot, the gardener Ledoux has come to see me. He asserts that he has important information to give me respecting Michel's death. To say the truth, I can't see why he does not go to the magistrate. However, here he comes."

Indeed, Jaspeline's husband was now to be seen approaching down the garden walk, with that slow measured tread peculiar to a vicar of the country, and with one might almost call the country slouch. He had dyed himself in his newest coat, and stood hat in hand, for although of an independent character, he was not one of those who sneer at social hierarchy, but he willingly gave every one his due, as he was in the habit of saying. "What is the matter, Monsieur Ledoux?" politely asked the count, stepping a few yards towards him.

"It's just this, Monsieur le Comte," said the gardener, after making a bow to the party. "I wanted to tell you that only yesterday morning my wife received a letter just as she was setting out to catch the train; but I ought to tell you also that she can't read, and so, as I was out when the man called, she carried the paper off with her to Paris and only received it late in the evening."

"Excuse me," interrupted the count, annoyed by the seemingly irrelevant preamble, "I don't quite see——"

"Wait half a second, Monsieur le Comte! I ought to have begun by telling you that the letter was connected with the case of your gamekeeper——"

"What! with Michel?"

"Yes, Michel. The poor old fellow was my wife's cousin; that was why he wrote to warn her that he would come to harm."

"What! she was warned that——"

"Exactly, as you will soon see, for here's the letter, Monsieur le Comte," said old Ledoux, handing M. de Brannes a folded paper.

Gabrielle drew nearer to Julien and said in an undertone, "Who knows it may not be the proof of innocence that I prayed God to send you?"

"My wife wished me to take the letter to the gendarmes," continued Ledoux, whilst M. de Brannes was unfolding the paper, "but I had no particular wish to please the sergeant, and I said to myself Monsieur de Brannes will be glad if I make him a present of the note, and so I came right here."

"You did right, my friend," said the count, after glancing at the letter; "but it will still be necessary to place it in the hands of the legal authorities. It is an extraordinary document! Just listen Julien," and M. de Brannes began slowly reading the following sentences: "A person who knows that he is related to the gamekeeper named Michel, warns you that his life is threatened, and recommends you to advise him not to enter the Classeneuil woods this evening; if he dared to go there alone he would be a dead man. He is in good faith, and Michel's life depends on your expedition in conveying him warning. Burn this letter."

"It's indeed very strange," said the nephew, "and of course it is not true?"

"No, and there is not even the formula with which anonymous letters generally conclude, such as 'a friend,' or sometimes 'Your sincere wisher.'"

"Have you got the envelope?" asked Julien of Ledoux.

"That stupid Jacqueline lost it on the road."

"So that we can't possibly tell where the letter was posted. It is most annoying."

"My wife only remembers that it bore a twopenny stamp."

"The postman can be questioned. Perhaps he may have had the curiosity to look where it came from, and may remember."

"That is not so unlikely, as he does not often have to bring Jacqueline's letters, so he may have looked at this one more closely than at other people's."

"It is quite possible," said the count, "but how did Madame Ledoux take no notice of this warning?"

"Ah, as far as that is concerned, it is all my fault; Jacqueline came back from Paris just after eight, she brought a little chap from the Foundling Hospital with her—a stupid freak of hers. She left him with Mademoiselle Rose, who keeps the Grand Vainqueur, as she passed, and then started off for your château. But as the devil would have it, she met me in the street, and I was not over steady on my legs, having drunk too much *kirsch* with Monsieur Wassmann's coachman. So she gave me a prettily blowing up. In fact, we had a good row, and while this was going on—

"Poor Michel was killed," broke in M. de Brannes. "There is a certain amount of fatality about the whole business; but what is to be thought of this letter?"

This question was addressed to Julien, who held the document in his hand, and was examining it minutely. "It is a woman's writing," said the young lawyer, "and it does not seem to me to be at all disguised. The lines are straight, the writing small and sloping in the English style, and the person's hand shook a little towards the end. The paper is superfinely glazed, but rather thin, and it still retains a slight odour of patchouli."

"It is most astonishing, quite incomprehensible," muttered the count. "a fashionable lady could hardly interest herself about Michel, who was an old soldier who had spent half his life in Africa and smoked his daily pipe in quietude."

"Add to that, my dear uncle, the fact, that this fashionable lady must be intimately connected with the murderer, since she was aware of his design."

"And this murderer forewarns the person who betrays him, that on a certain evening at a given hour, he means to murder my gamekeeper. It is still more inexplicable!"

"And why in the world should this unknown friend write to Madame Ledoux, instead of communicating directly with Michel?"

"Faith! gentlemen," said the gardener, "I can't make anything out of it any more than you can. It is the magistrate's business to unravel it all. I am not going to mix myself up in it, and by your leave I will go back, as I have some work to do in my garden."

"You are willing to leave the letter with us?"

"Well, considering I came on purpose to bring it to you!"

"I am deeply grateful to you, my friend," said M. de Brannes warmly. "you are doing a great service to justice, for this document may possibly be a great help towards the discovery of the truth."

"I don't very well see how," said Ledoux, "but at any rate, I

ueline or I am wanted, there we are." And having made a respectful
the old fellow went away as stolidly as he had come.

"Do you think, uncle," asked Julien, "that it is obligatory for us to put
note in the hands of the examining magistrate?"

"Of course. Why do you ask that question?"

"Because I think that I should make more out of it. The magistrate will
ably attach less importance to it: perhaps he will only see some hoax
". Whilst I could follow up the inquiries in my own way, obtain infor-
tion secretly and skilfully in the neighbourhood, hunt up specimens of the
dwriting of all such people as have known Michel and the woman
oux; and, by comparing them with this anonymous letter, elucidate the
blem in a decisive manner."

"C. de Brames reflected for a moment, and then said: "It would perhaps
he surer plan; but it is impracticable, and you might even compromise
rself seriously by trying it. Just reflect a minute, at the present time the
le village must know the story of this mysterious letter, and Ledoux
't fail to tell everyone that he has entrusted the paper to me."

"True. It is better to resort to the regular course, but have you remarked
peculiar style used by Ledoux's male, or as it seems to me, female
rmant."

"No, I did not take any particular notice of it, but if you will again read
note to me——"

"First of all, uncle, the spelling is irreproachable, just like the writing,
on the other hand, note this faulty expression: 'recommend you to
ise him.' It ought to have been 'advises you to recommend him.' The
on who wrote the note can have had but an imperfect acquaintance with
hich. Moreover, the phrase, 'if he dared to go there alone he would
a dead man,' has quite a melo-dramatic ring. People don't write like
t in every day life, or in correct society."

"No," said the count, "and besides that subsequent sentence, 'your exp-
ousness in conveying him warning,' is quite in the stiff style of an old dow-
r; people expressed themselves like that in the days of Louis XV."

"Well, may I ask you, uncle, what conclusion you draw from these
uliarities?"

"I confess that I can come to no conclusion. This warning seems an un-
werable riddle sent from no one knows where to a distant relative of the
n it is seemingly intended to protect, whereas it might very well have
n sent to him direct."

"But, papa," said Mademoiselle de Brames, who had so far not taken any
t in the conversation, although she had attentively listened to every word
t, "might not this person have known that Michel was acquainted with her
dwriting, and might she not have wanted to prevent his seeing it? Per-
s that was why she wrote at the end of the note, 'Burn this letter.'"

"Quite so?" muttered Julien.

"So you were listening to us, my dear Gabrielle?" said the count smiling,
hereas I thought you were up in the clouds!"

"No, no," replied the young girl, "I am here, and I am as deeply inter-
ed in this affair as any body in the world."

"Really? I did not know you had such an inclination for criminal mys-
es; but since you have a turn that way just give us your opinion of this
e."

"I think," said Gabrielle frankly, "that this letter proves the entire
ocence of the poacher."

"Oh! oh! please show me how!"

"Very easily, father. First of all it isn't to be imagined that a man his class could have inspired any interest in a person using scented paper and writing an English hand."

"Why not? He inspires you with a feeling of interest, if I am not mistaken?"

"And that is not everything," continued the girl, without resenting the count's somewhat malevolent hit; "there is a still stronger reason in his favour. Did you not say during breakfast, that this poacher had been surprised by Michel, in the act of killing a pheasant?"

"Dash it! What a memory you have, mademoiselle!"

"And that he had only committed the crime to avoid being arrested?" added Gabrielle, without being in the least disconcerted.

"That is indeed highly probable."

"Well, if this crime merely resulted from a chance meeting, how could the writer of the letter have predicted it, and given full information respecting it?"

"Gabrielle, my dear child," said M. de Brannes, "I begin to think you were born to wear a barrister's gown. God knows whence you inherited such instincts? Certainly not from your own ancestors, who were men of the sword."

Julien looked at his cousin, with his eyes brimful of a feeling akin to admiration. His ancestors also had been military men, but this did not prevent his being a lawyer, or, considering that Gabrielle was the most charming girl in the world. In the present instance, moreover, he thought that she was right. On this last point his uncle did not agree with him!

"My dear Gabrielle," said the count, in a half mocking, half indignant manner, "I fancy that this problem bears no resemblance to those which were given you to solve at the convent, and it is not right for a young girl to occupy her mind with such a horrid story. Moreover, here comes the sergeant of gendarmes and Dr. Minard, and it is really not becoming for you to remain here listening to their statements."

"Oh, I have not the least wish to see these gentlemen," replied Mademoiselle de Brannes, "Julien will represent me splendidly," she added, giving her cousin a significant glance. And thereupon she ran off towards the chateau steps, tripped lightly up them, and disappeared behind a curtain of Japanese silk, which closed the entrance of a little sitting-room overlooking the garden. The doctor and the sub-officer, who arrived by one of the side walks, had not even time to catch a glimpse of her.

The sergeant looked radiant, and the doctor also had a self-satisfied air which did not promise well for the accused criminal. Julien knew from experience that the auxiliaries of the law take a delight in running down the guilty; and from the contentment beaming on the countenance of the two visitors, he concluded that the poacher, overwhelmed by the circumstantial evidence, had ended by confessing his guilt. This disturbed him on account of Gabrielle, whom he believed quite capable of not pardoning a defeat. M. de Brannes, on the contrary, asked nothing better than the avengement of his keeper's death, and he would have been delighted to learn that Robert's guilt was no longer doubtful. "Well, gentlemen? How is the case progressing? Has the examining magistrate come yet?" he asked after returning the bows addressed to him.

"Come and gone, Monsieur le Comte," replied the sergeant, rubbing his hands. "Oh, we've made short work of the business, and I flatter myself on

g pretty quick. At midnight my report was ready and I sent it off to be by one of my men. This morning the gentlemen of the public prosecutor arrived by the first train. At eight o'clock the *post mortem* was : at nine the *autopsie* was concluded; at ten we accompanied the ner into the *chambre ardente* for the authentication of the charge; at everything was completed, and now I have nothing more to do except catch the man to Paris. He will sleep to-night at Mazas."

"I am certainly rather surprised that my presence was not requested at inquiry," said M. de Brannes.

"The gentlemen don't let it useless to trouble you, Monsieur le Comte, know that you will be summoned to the Palais de Justice to-morrow."

"And so the wife of this unhappy man was not questioned?"

"No, Monsieur le Comte, for fear of some heart-breaking scene, and also use they expect to get more out of her by avoiding a meeting between and her husband, who can make her say anything he likes by simply ng at her. I have orders to keep a watch upon her and take her to s, where she will be examined. Your nephew also will be summoned appear, as well as the boating party of ladies and gentlemen, and such of servants, Monsieur le Comte, as saw the dead body. To day, however, magistrate contented himself with questioning the cure of Charly, who all is the principal witness."

"And no doubt some fresh clue was obtained?"

"Ten times more clues than were necessary, Monsieur le Comte, just Dr. Minard."

"Oh, my story is soon told," modestly replied the doctor. "My examination proves that the shot was fired from a short distance, for Michel's clothes not scorched, and yet the shot balled; secondly, there was no struggle between the victim and his murderer, and finally, the shot found in the and are of the same number as those extracted from the pheasant."

"That is more than sufficient, I hope, to ensure the fellow's conviction," rered M. de Brannes.

"And it's conclusive even if no other evidence existed!" exclaimed the ant, "but everything is going against him, and his guilt is only too plain. y, as for the gun which he argued about so warmly last night, another has been discovered on the turf where he fired his first at the pheasant, and another one has been picked up at the spot where el fell. Now these two, and these I picked up yesterday, make four s in all, two for each barrel of the gun, and it's no use pretending any rs were carried away by the wind or rain, for it was a splendid night. ere could have been no third shot, as the scamp pretended."

"That is quite evident."

"It is unnecessary to tell you that Michel's gun was still loaded, which es that the poor fellow was surprised, and had no time to make use of eapon."

"In that case," said Julien gently, "it was not he who surprised the her, and he did not, as you thought in the first instance, threaten to eute him, at which the man retorted by firing his gun?"

"Oh, the rascal had no need of any other reason to fire. He no t murdered him out of revenge for his previous conviction. And es all this goes for nothing compared to the evidence given by his rence the priest."

"What did the priest say?" asked the count; "nothing more, I dare- than we already know."

"Begging your pardon ! yesterday his reverence was so upset that he had not a very clear idea of what had taken place, but this morning his memory returned to him, and when he appeared before the examining magistrate informed him that Michel was not quite dead when he raised him up, that the poor man had tried to speak in order to name his murderer, and——"

"And that he lacked the necessary strength to do so, eh?" finished the young lawyer.

"Not that exactly, he said enough for one to know what to think. In his trying to name his murderer it's clear that he was acquainted with him. And, in fact, he was perfectly acquainted with the scoundrel, as he had already collared him more than once."

"This fellow was not the only person known to him in that way, so don't consider that goes for much."

"Perhaps not, but we have better proof than that. Before breathing his last, Michel most distinctly articulated, 'The murderer was the po——' He did not finish the word, but if that did not signify the poacher, I consent to lose my stripes."

"I am not at all sure, sergeant, that I heard the whole of the first syllable. Michel certainly gave a faint articulation resembling the sound po—— the word he wished to utter undoubtedly began with a 'p,' that's all I can really vouch for."

This correction was made by M. Jean himself, who had been able to approach unperceived, the party being so absorbed in their conversation of this mournful subject. The worthy priest bowed to M. de Brannes, who received him with deferential courtesy, shook hands with Julien de Chanterie, and bade the doctor and sergeant a friendly good-day. "Well, it's much the same thing," said the latter, who did not relish his assertion being commented upon.

"Remember though," rejoined Julien, "There are any number of poachers in this part of the county, and it is quite possible that Michel meant an entirely different individual."

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders and glanced mistrustfully at the self-constituted counsel, who ventured to contradict him every minute.

"Gentlemen," said the Count de Brannes, so as to change the subject. "We are not the judges, but it is our duty to clear the way for justice. Here is a letter that Ledoux, the old gardener, just brought me, and which was sent to his wife."

"I was just going to ask you for it, Monsieur le Comte, to add it to the other documents," interrupted the sergeant; "I just met old Ledoux, who told me all about it, and I remonstrated with him for not having brought it to me at once, last night."

"And I," said M. Jean, "curse my own carelessness. The woman Ledoux had spoken to me of the warning she had received, and if instead of trusting to her, I had hastened to the château, I might perhaps have been in time to prevent this sad misfortune."

"I confess," answered M. de Brannes, "that this anonymous letter almost seems to me to be in favour of the accused. It is fairly well written and it is difficult to believe that the person who sent it could have any connection with a rascal of this kind."

"Excuse me, Monsieur le Comte," said the sergeant, "on the contrary it is easily explained as this rascal has not always lived by marauding. He was well educated, was once rich and squandered his money, or rather his wife's money, in Paris. It wouldn't be so surprising if he had some fas-

among his acquaintances, and I am half of opinion that the letter in question was written by some particular female friend of his. We shall find by finding her, never fear."

"How has any information been obtained about him?" asked M. de Brames with some little astonishment.

"It was received from the Prefecture of Police. You can readily imagine, Monsieur, that a ruffian of his stamp has his regular judicial record. I have the papers referring to him; a pretty description! Martin (Robert) enlisted in the 8th Hussars, became non-commissioned officer, and advanced to the ranks for insubordination; accused of the abduction of a girl, but discharged as the father of the girl withdrew from the prosecution. Robert then married her—she's that same woman we saw yesterday strolling singer. When released from the service, Robert became manager of an agency for procuring military substitutes; five years afterwards he was prosecuted for debt; subsequently compromised in a political plot, he was condemned by default, having succeeded in escaping to England. He returned to France after the last amnesty; and since has been condemned three times by the Correctional Court for poaching, both as regards game and fish."

"That amply suffices to explain everything," interrupted the count. "But there is no mention in these papers is there," asked M. Jean, "of that poor woman who had the misfortune to marry him?"

"None whatever, your reverence, the scandal reduced both her and her children to starvation. It is not her fault if she has to earn her living by singing in the streets."

"Then she won't be disturbed in reference to this sad business?"

"No, your reverence, she will only have to keep herself at the disposal of the examining magistrate, who may perhaps wish to question her several times."

"And, as she might take it into her head not to appear against her husband, she will be watched. It is even quite probable she will be kept in custody at the Préfecture Dépôt in Paris."

"But supposing that I undertook to place her among some worthy people who would procure her work to do? And that I held myself answerable for her?"

"Oh! as for that, your reverence, you ought to see the investigating magistrate. I shall take her before him to-morrow, and as you are also concerned——"

"I shall go and ask for his authorisation, which I hope he will not refuse. To-day, Monsieur le Comte, you will doubtless allow me to offer her some consolations she must greatly need?"

"I was just going to propose it, your reverence," said M. de Brames, rising towards the steps of the chateau, which was a polite way of indicating to his visitors that they might now retire. The doctor and the count took the hint and departed.

The count accompanied M. Jean to the stables, above which the singer had momentarily accommodated, and Julien, actuated by a fixed idea, left the garden by a gate communicating with the Bellière woods. He could not get from himself, the fact, that but little chance of pleasing his cousin remained to him, if to obtain that result, it was necessary to prove the singer's innocence. Evidence was rapidly accumulating against the condemned man, and whatever little acquaintance one might have with criminal cases, there was no deceiving oneself as to the fate awaiting him. The young lawyer quite felt this, and in slipping out of the garden he heartily

cursed the strange caprices of Mademoiselle de Brannes. Gabrielle treated him like the wicked fairies in Perrault's story books treated the poor princesses, whom they condemned to sort grains of corn from enormous heaps of barley and rye ; or to disentangle huge skeins of variegated wool. She imposed upon him a task which it seemed utter impossible to accomplish. And yet he was determined to try and accomplish it, and at last to struggle on to the bitter end, even against all the evidence. The anonymous letter had given him a ray of hope. It certainly seemed strange that the poacher should have confidential friends able to write in that style, but the information obtained by the sergeant of gendarmes had set everything in question again. Taking Robert's former riotous life into consideration it was quite possible that he had kept up a connection with the few women whom he had once known. There was nothing so improbable about the surmise that he had revealed his revengeful designs to some woman who, in her terror, had tried to warn his intended victim. However, without a hint of reflection, Julien ended by realising that there was another side to the question, for granting that the warning had come from one of the man's female friends, it followed that the said friend was acquainted with Jacqueline's relationship to Michel, since she had written to the market-gardener's wife, instead of simply warning the keeper himself. She must have had particular reasons for this course of action. And so, this female friend could not be any Parisienne, she must rather be an inhabitant of Charleville or at any rate she was well informed respecting the kinships of the people of that place. From all these various deductions, which were well nigh irrefutable, it followed that the inquiries must be limited to a very narrow radius. Indeed, on the whole, the letter was rather a piece of evidence in favour of the poacher, for he rarely ventured into the village, and above all he associated with nobody there. He rambled about the woods at night, and when he did not sell his game to passing boating men, he smuggled it into Paris, but he took good care not to offer it for sale to the middle class people of the locality. From this it was allowable to argue that Jacqueline's correspondent had no connection with him. At any rate, before arriving at the truth, whatever it might be, it was first necessary to discover the writer of the letter. On that discovery the solution of the mystery depended. If by any chance one succeeded in learning whose hand had penned those ten lines of fine writing which the sergeant had carried away with him to add to the other documents in the case, the name of the criminal would not be far off.

Julien's impartial and sagacious mind was greatly struck by this new aspect of the case, and he said to himself that this was the line his inquiries ought to take, if he wished to fulfil Gabrielle's behest. Still the enterprise was none the less arduous, especially as he was only a passing visitor at the château, and had no intercourse whatever with the people of Charleville. How could he manage to become acquainted with them, unless he were willing to join in the games of dominoes at the Café du Grand Vainqueur. M. de la Chanterie reflected that without being reduced to such extremities he might easily go and see the woman Ledoux, and discreetly try to obtain some useful information from her ; moreover, he might ask the worthy priest to collect items on his side. And besides there was chance to be considered, and you may always rely a little bit on chance in the affairs of this world. These were but faint hopes to go upon, certainly, but Julien was obliged to remain satisfied with them, for no other course was open to him. His thoughts were thus occupied, as he advanced with some little difficulty

th that part of the Bélière woods, bordering on the garden gate. e going in quest of any particular person, he wished to study all the instances of the crime, on the immediate spot: to examine the glade Michel had fallen, follow the road by which he had reached it, and hat traces there were of the route taken by the murderer; in a word, ke on his own account the investigations which had been conducted so erially by the representatives of justice.

he previous evening, when the blood stained body of the unfortunate still lay upon the moss, Julien had had neither the time nor the m of thought necessary to examine things calmly. To-day he wished ly the ground thoroughly, to examine the paths and bushes minutely, ise the foliage and even the bark of the trees. He had, moreover, d to keep his discoveries to himself, if he happened to make any fresh nd to work henceforth unaided. It was almost quite natural that he wish to do without the assistance of the sergeant of gendarmes, since elected to pursue a contrary course of action, in fact, to collect ma- for the defence, just as the zealous official had gathered them together pose of conviction. Julien was perfectly well acquainted with the e woods, which were only a continuation of his uncle's park, and were s a preserve for the pheasants of the forest of Apilly. He had shot e woods more than once, though not so often as he would have liked, de Braunes was rather a strict game preserver, and only granted eople the permission to use his private shooting ground on very grand ns. Julien knew that the underwood covered the hillslope as far village, and even a little beyond it. In the direction of the high road, er the high street of Chailly, there were a pretty thick hedge and a a-ha to prevent trespassing, and yet below the slope along the towing- he wood was not protected by any kind of enclosure. Limited in one on by the wall of the garden and park of Chasseneuil, the wood was at the opposite end, by some unclaiming meadow land, which ex- as far as the outbuildings of the Pavillon des Sorbiers. Here again side of the square no obstacle was offered to trespassing. To sum might enter or leave the wood on two sides—by the path winding he bank of the Morge, or by the meadows adjoining Les Sorbiers. acher had come on game by the river path, there was not the least about it, since he himself did not deny it. Now, the keeper, Michel, oment he fell, had come from the château by the garden gate. It mained to be proved, whether anyone else, who was neither the nor the poacher under arrest, had entered the wood and been there ame time as Robert and Michel. Julien began by searching for the here the pheasants had been shot, and he easily recognised it. On g the three tall trees which Robert had pointed out, he at once el sundry small tears produced by a shot on the bark of the trunk- er branches; and then he began to measure the distance between these nd the glade. There were at least thirty paces and no beaten path; e murderer had followed a straight line, he must have left some traces assage. M. de la Chanterie could see none whatever. It was true, r, that in a like manner none had been left by the gendarmes, the M. de Braunes and himself when they accompanied the prisoner to t on the previous night, but perhaps this was because they had been to move about slowly and with due precautions.

he other hand, however, from the standers to the towing path, there aces which might be followed step by step, broken branches, torn

ferns and long grass trodden down. Everything went to show that Ro had hastily fled after picking up the pheasant, and that he had dashed through the woods, bending low, pushing through the thickets like a boar, and only intent upon reaching the open. This first exploration therefore entirely in favour of the prisoner, and this happy result decided Julien to prosecute matters still further. He returned to the glade, examined the spot where Michel had fallen, and saw nothing noticeable. The turf had absorbed the poor gamekeeper's blood, the little wild flowers which had been bent by the weight of his corpse, had sprung up afresh, and the birds were singing among the leaves. No one could have guessed that a crime had been committed here, under this dome of foliage, on this mossy carpet, and Julien was obliged to exert himself to recall the fact that he had not come for the sole purpose of admiring the beauties of nature, which he always beholds with an indifferent eye the villainy of men. Julien completed his investigation by searching that part of the wood extending towards the meadow land, and he soon observed with extreme satisfaction that someone must have passed that way. The brushwood and the brambles were broken down just behind a large tree stump, just the thing to hide a man in ambuscade. Ought one to think that the murderer had waited in that particular place for the moment when Michel might pass within range of his gun? Julien asked himself this question, and was astonished that the sergeant had not noted this important point. As the young fellow stooped down to examine the stump more closely, he perceived half covered by a tuft of dry grass some paper, which he hastily picked up, and at his first glance, by the way in which this paper was rolled into a ball, Julien realised that it must have done duty as a gun-wad. The discovery was highly important, and the young advocate immediately understood its full value. If this wad had come from the barrel of a gun, it was evident that three shots had been fired, or one more than the prosecution admitted. By this discovery the entire theory of the sergeant of gendarmes fell to the ground, and M. de la Chanterie, who was quick of thought, instantly regretted the absence of witnesses, for he wisely guessed that doubts would be raised as to the authenticity of his find. However, he commenced examining it, and noted that it bore on one side traces of the shot upon which it had rested in the gun barrel. Under the heavy pressure of the ramrod, which had driven the wad home, the grains of shot had, in fact, left deep impressions; the wad had neither been damaged nor blackened by gunpowder, a proof that the weapon had not been fired off. This was a fresh deception which left matters much in the same state as before, and gave new strength to the sergeant's theory. Julien could make nothing out of it at first, but by turning the paper over and over, he ended by remarking some slight traces on the opposite surface to that which had come in contact with the chamber of shot.

"Fool that I am," he muttered, "a wad hook made those tears," and on examining the paper more closely he saw that there could be no doubt about it; the murderer had drawn the wad out of his gun, and substituted for this paper some felt washers, such as had been found near the corpse. If he had time to have had time to plan and carry out this precautionary step he must have watched a considerable time in his hiding place for Michel's arrival, and this conclusion was in favour of the poacher, to whom such a cunning trick would hardly have suggested itself, and who furthermore would not have had the time to execute it. Now for what reason could the guilty person, whoever he might be, have taken the trouble to change his wad

st moment? Evidently because he had suddenly remembered that paper wad might compromise him if it happened to be found, and so at losing an instant he had extracted it from the barrel. It was strange that he had not put it in his pocket, instead of throwing it among the bushes; that was strange clumsiness on the part of such a ruffian. But nothing went to prove that he had thrown it there solely. It was quite likely that in his hurry he had unwittingly dropped this wad and that the darkness had prevented him from finding it. These deductions, of close but subtle logic, were arrived at by Julien in less time than it takes us to record them, and he finally concluded there must be some writing upon this paper. Otherwise, why had the murderer been so anxious to extract it from his gun? Delighted at his own sagacity, and full of hope, the young advocate hastened to unroll this pellet which perhaps bore the key-word to the mystery. He untold it with care, being anxious not to tear it. The paper was thin and of supple texture, and Julien soon saw that he had guessed rightly; it had formed the first half of a letter, but unfortunately there only remained one half of a single leaf, and further this leaf bore writing merely upon one side, probably because it contained the end of the missive. Scarcely had M. de la Chancelle glanced at its contents, than he realised, with unspeakable emotion, the handwriting was identical with that of the anonymous warning addressed to Jacqueline Lefevre. He could not make a mistake, he still expected to behold the fine slanting penmanship of the anonymous correspondent, and its resemblance with that now before him was positively striking. He longed to see if the epistle was couched in the same style, when after many precautions he had spread out the fragment on the palm of his hand, he was enabled to read some twenty unfinished lines of various length, as the paper had been torn lengthwise in a very hasty manner. It, in fact, seemed as if the letter had been hastily crumpled after being read, and then torn quickly into two or more strips, only one of which had been rammed down the barrel of the gun, unless, indeed, the second had formed the second wad—the one which could not be found, perhaps because it had been burnt by the gun powder. It was even allowable to imagine that the murderer had received this unfortunate message at the moment of starting on his hateful nocturnal expedition. However that may have been, the fragmentary epistle presented the appearance reproduced below:—

‘ Since I have left all to
 ‘ have not ceased a day to
 ‘ my devotion I have borne
 ‘ humiliations, all the tortures
 ‘ position, without complaint, without
 ‘ without one reproach. But self-sacrifice
 ‘ and I shall never have the courage
 ‘ an infamy; for it would be
 ‘ allow it to be thought by
 ‘ am free. There are moments
 ‘ ask myself if thy design is
 ‘ of me, if thou dost not hate me, if
 ‘ despise me, for indeed, O
 ‘ didst really love me, thou wouldst not command me
 ‘ this loyal young man,

"allure him here, to extort from him
 "days when thou terrifiest me, when
 "of ridding thyself of this keeper who
 "formerly in Alsace. I entreat thee
 "renounce this criminal
 "repeat that I am mad,
 "ask thee in mercy to
 "let me go away! Oh! if
 "how happy we should be
 "only one word, and I

When Julien had rapidly deciphered these several phrases, he did not find himself much wiser than he had been before the discovery of the guess to which he attached such importance. Instead of being solved, the problem had become still more complicated.

What exact sense could be attached to words which did not follow one another, lines which began and never ended? How could one connect thoughts divided into so many irregular shreds? What conclusions were to be drawn from this rebus? Where could the key to the riddle be found? At first, Julien thought he could never succeed in the matter, but after a little more consideration he reflected that a French savant had succeeded in deciphering hieroglyphics, and upon the whole it was much less difficult to complete this fragmentary letter than to discover what language had been used by the priests of Isis. On carefully re-perusing the torn paper, he succeeded in divining its general sense. The letter was that of a woman, an unhappy woman, that was quite obvious. This woman addressed a man she loved, who caused her sorrow. It was equally evident that the man in question could only be a wretched scoundrel, capable of abusing this unfortunate creature's affection. There were certain lines which suggested untold infamy on his part; in fact, that word infamy was written there in full. It was also evident from the last sentences that this ill-assorted couple were not permanently established at Charly-sous-Bois, although residing there at the present time. These various indications, imperfect as they were, were nevertheless highly significant, and might with time, lead to the unravelling of the truth. But what was even more important than all these side-lights, was the certainty that this letter had been addressed to Michel, the murderer, as was fully demonstrated by the several line which contained these significant words, "ridding thyself of this keeper;" while looking down the page one read: "renounce this criminal," the word "designing" evidently completing the adjuration.

Nothing more was wanted for an opinion to be formed on this important point; and it might be inferred that the woman who had begged Michel to spare the life of his murderer had also attempted to warn the keeper of the fate in store for him—keeping back, however, the name of the scoundrel who meant to strike the fatal blow. Unfortunately there was nothing in the fragment that would enable one to identify the murderer, although his name had certainly figured in the missive, as was proved by the interjection "O" close to which the paper was most unluckily torn away. This "O" had certainly been followed by some surname or Christian name, which would have cleared up the whole mystery, and Julien cursed the fatality by which the paper had been torn in twain at that very point. It was to be noted that the use of this interjection concurred perfectly with the emphatic style of the letter sent to Jacqueline. Who had written the two missives—tha

the question, and the young lawyer determined to retain this precious document and to show it to nobody, rightly thinking, that in such an important case, absolute secrecy alone could ensure success.

With the findings he now possessed, he felt pretty sure of speedily arriving at the truth, and he was racking his brain, trying to think whom this perfect information could refer to, among all the residents of the little town of Ch. rly, when a new idea suddenly occurred to him, and threw him into a terrible fright, for, if it should prove correct, all his hopes would be shattered.

"Supposing this letter came from the poacher's wife?" he muttered to himself.

This supposition was not at all an unlikely one, and he felt astonished that he had not occurred to him sooner. If it were well founded, there would be no longer be any room for doubt. The murderer could be Robert.

In looking for proofs of the innocence of Gabrielle's singular accuser, the lawyer had stumbled on a document which would amply suffice to secure that interesting personage's conviction. It was indeed a stroke of ill luck! Julien looked sorrowfully at the crumpled paper, which perhaps proved a death warrant if delivered up to the officers of the law, and then began comparing the evidence, and revolving in his mind all he knew of the wandering songstress in whom Mademoiselle de Brames had taken such a lively interest. The priest of Charly had told him the previous evening that this woman, before sinking so low, had moved in a better class of society, that she came of an honest family, and had been well brought up. That being the case, it was quite possible that she was tolerably well, and Julien fancied that the rather emphatic and cautious mannerism of the two letters coincided with the degree of actual culture she must have received. In following out this theory, he would certainly have to admit that this virtuoso of the streets was acquainted with old Ledoux's wife, and with her relationship to Michel: this was not altogether impossible. Although the singer did not live in Charly, she might have come there many a time plying her wandering trade, and there was nothing to prevent her being acquainted with several inhabitants of the locality. Everything else would tally with this surmise, especially all of the imperfect phases corresponded with the attitude of the letter towards his wife Eugénie. The writer of the letter dwelt on her position, her humiliation, and the sacrifices she had made or was called upon to make. These remarks must have flowed readily from the pen of a creature who had been tyrannised over and ill-treated for years past. Moreover, the allusion to some *infamy* which the recipient of the letter no doubt would be led to perpetrate, seemed very well with the character of this ruffian. Far down there came an humble petition: *I ask you in mercy, if you will, to let me go away.* An easily explained wish on the part of an unhappy woman, who shuddered every moment lest she might be compromised with her children in a criminal case. Even the words, *formerly in Alsace*, were easily understood. Michel had been born at Colmar, a garrison town, and his father, who had formerly served in a hussar regiment, might certainly have met the keeper there, and his wife probably alluded to this circumstance. There still remained the passage referring to certain *secrets to be kept* from someone. This alone was difficult of interpretation; the rest was very clear, or at any rate it appeared so to M. de la Chanterie, who was nearly lost all hope.

How could he appear before Mademoiselle de Brames, to acquaint her

with the dismal result of his investigations? She was already sufficiently inclined to deride his professional achievements, and what would she say, an advocate who, at the very outset of his career, sent his client straight to the scaffold? Julien was, moreover, anxious not to incur her anger, which he dreaded even more than her derision. He had better a hundred times keep to himself the damning evidence of this scrap of paper, and even burn it, as soon as he had made perfectly sure that it had come from the poet-singer. On the other hand, his conscience told him that this would be the most serious thing to do; for no one has a right to suppress a legal document, and professional duty called upon him to produce it, so that justice might be enlightened. The young fellow began to realise that it is always a mistake to enter upon doubtful undertakings, and that he would have done much better had he declined the secret mission which his charming cousin had imposed upon him. He ended, however, by confessing to himself that he was not yet utterly beaten—that it was at any rate still necessary to compare the handwriting of the poacher's wife with that on the letter, and that time might throw new light upon the mystery.

He had arrived at this conclusion and had just secreted the precious document in his pocket-book, when he fancied he heard something stirring behind him in the coppice. He turned quickly round, but could see nobody. He had spent fully a quarter of an hour in meditation, leaning his back against the very trunk, at the foot of which he had picked up the scrap of paper, and he thought he was quite alone. At this time of day and considering the great heat, a person must like himself have had some particular motive for rambling through the Bélière woods, which were not adapted to a quiet stroll. Paths were rarely met with, and the only straight road to be found ran along the park wall. There it was that the count stationed his gamekeepers when he did the honours at a grand pheasant battue, and it was a fine place to shoot from. But this part of the wood, furthest removed from the château, was but a succession of thickets in which the game found a safe retreat for M. de Brannes, who was a great sportsman and very rich, did not clear down wood for sale, preferring to have plenty of good cover in October when but little game was left in the fields. People, therefore, seldom penetrated the thick scrub, excepting the beaters on great field days, and sometimes some poachers and the keepers in search of them. Michel had been killed just at the point where the underwood, not so thick on the side of the park, ceased to be easily accessible, and Julien was on the outskirts of the denser bushes. He naturally thought that the sound which had roused him from his reverie proceeded from a startled rabbit seeking its hole, or from an old cock pheasant disturbed in its meditations. However, he instinctively continued listening, and he soon detected more distinct and characteristic sounds. Branches were crackling in the distance and dry leaves rustling, under a heavy wary tread which was certainly not that of an animal. Julien was endowed with very acute hearing, and he even thought he could recognise the peculiar scratching sound caused by thorns catching in a man's clothes as he pushed through a thicket. There was no longer any doubt about it, some one was walking near him, and walking cautiously so as not to be heard.

It seemed strange to Julien that any person should wish to remain unperceived in full daylight, as if he had been a midnight burglar, and he was asking himself what could be the meaning of it, when suddenly it occurred to him that he was being spied upon. By whom, and with what object? He could not yet guess, but he kept perfectly still, waiting for the move-

to become yet more doubtful. There was still a low sound of footsteps, and the sound of approaching grew more and more distinct. "It must be the murderer," he concluded by saying, "the murderer, who was, as, coming here to look for the compromising gun-wad, which he believed having lost, the murderer flying off because he caught sight of me. But in that case, the animal can't have been the poacher." But out on a sudden his doubts on the subject, M. de la Chanterie began to waver at the top of his voice: "Who goes there?"

His voice was feeble, but the crackling became twice as loud, and the footsteps far more rapid. This at once made it evident that the man had important reasons for not showing himself, and that he was now to escape. "Ah! this time at any rate, I'll find out the truth," said M. de la Chanterie, as he rushed head foremost into the thicket.

The man must be of the sort that knows no fear, and in love into the bargain, to rush unhesitatingly into a similar adventure. The fugitive, or he might be, was of all appearance animated by sinister designs, or he probably he was well armed, and would use his weapons sooner than allow himself to be captured. Julien had not even a walking stick with to defend himself, and, furthermore, he was so lightly clad, that even in pushing through the thick bushes, he exposed his skin to the risk of terrible tears and scratches. He was daunted by nothing, however, not by the prospect, such as it was, of a freebie one for a young and handsome man, and finding then his man, that with scarred cheeks, a damaged nose, perhaps an eye put out by a briar. The fugitive had made off as fast as he could, and from this moment a desperate chase commenced. M. de la Chanterie was not worsted, in so far as he maintained his distance, at the cost of untold efforts and innumerable scratches, but he did not succeed in coming on his adversary. He followed on his *serpent*, as poachers say, to say he was pursued by the animal, for the underwood was too thick to allow him to catch sight of the person he was pursuing. Two or three times, however, he seized the end of a thin blade caught for a moment in a briar, and so, by repeated blows, but this was all, the man's figure and face were never visible. Still Julien was not discouraged. He had noticed that the man was flying in the direction where the wood was skirted by a meadow on the extent, and he said to himself, that on being driven to the edge of the wood, the rogue would have to take to the open and thus show himself. The ancient fellow would have reflected that herein lay the danger, and the fugitive forced upon his last retreat would turn upon the pursuer self makes head against boards. But Julien thought only of obeying Gabrielle, and Gabrielle had said: "You must help me to prove the poacher's innocence." So he now redoubled his efforts. He no longer doubted that he was on the murderer's track, or at least on the track of some accomplice, and he was ready to risk his life even to get a glimpse of the man's face. A decisive moment approached, for this desperate chase had been lasting ten minutes without any advantage on either side, and the meadow was not now far off. The underwood had become scantier, and Julien, finding the fact, already felt delighted at thinking the race was won, suddenly he fancied he saw the fugitive change his path and diverge to the right, that is to say towards the lower part of the wood. Soon, however, could be no possible doubt on the point, for the noise came from the underwood covering the slope a little further down. Julien turned in this direction, although the fugitive's sudden bend made him somewhat anxious. Did the coundrel mean to defend himself by doubling on Julien in the thick

shrub like a hunted deer? The young fellow began to suspect so, although already very tired and still more out of breath, he was determined to hold on till the finish, that is as long as his legs would support him. Fortunately, the chase never took this turn. On the contrary, the fugitive made up his mind, and commenced descending the slope in a straight line. This course would necessarily bring him out on the bank of the Marne, which flowed along below the Bélière woods. He would be obliged to leave the cover, but instead of being under the necessity of crossing a wide expanse of meadow land, in full view of a spectator, he would reach a narrow bank with the choice of following a well-frequented pathway, or leaping in the river—alternatives, which barely gave him a chance of escaping Julien's sight. He no doubt realised his danger for he quickened his pace still more, probably with the aim of gaining space a time enough, to disappear round a sudden turn of the towing-path, ere his adversary had left the wood. He careered onward like a cannon ball through the thickest clumps of underwood, and leapt like a stag over the tallest bushes. In a few moments he would reach the edge of the cover.

Julien was quite aware that the critical moment had arrived, and he collected all his energy to make a supreme effort, like a race-horse who is given his head at the distance so that before reaching the winning post he may pass a rival now two or three lengths in front of him. He, indeed, put on such a spurt, and went at so great a pace, that he would probably have come up with the run-away at the moment when the latter reached the pathway. But, most unluckily, in the very middle of a leap, eclipsing his previous efforts, his foot caught in a bramble, and he fell forward with his arms outstretched. The shock was all the greater as the ground sloped steeply downwards, and to heighten the young lawyer's misfortune, he had fallen headlong among thistles and briars. He narrowly escaped losing an eye, and was badly scratched on his hands and face. However, he retained his presence of mind sufficiently to try and rise at once, but this was not easily accomplished. Such props as were near at hand consisted mainly of yielding boughs studded with thorns. They gave way under his weight as soon as he caught hold of them, and the only result was that he pricked his hands severely. In addition, his feet had caught in the under-brush, and the more he tried to free them, the more the prickly creepers twisted round them like snakes in porcupine garb. To complete Julien's despair, there was no longer any sound of the fugitive. He had plainly succeeded in escaping from the underwood, and was now flying at full speed along the level road. All was not yet lost, however; there was still a chance of coming up with him in the open. Julien, greatly excited by this remaining hope, kicked and struggled with such strength that he ended by kicking loose from the tangled shrub, and found himself once more at liberty; but not without leaving sundry shreds of his clothes, and even of his skin.

Then he rushed wildly towards the edge of the wood which was now but a few paces in front of him, and to set every chance on his side he began shouting at the top of his voice: "Stop thief! Murder!" hoping to give the alarm to any people as might chance to be on the river bank, and induce them to seize the scoundrel as he was making off. Reaching the outskirts of the wood, very excited, but by no means discouraged, he leapt into the middle of the towing-path, where a great deception awaited him. The path stretched away to right and left like an endless yellow ribbon, edging the green robe which decked the river's brink, and was at last lost to view. In the distance, there being no turns, hillocks, or intervening obstacles of any

In front flowed the Marne, peaceful and silent, its waters untroubled by wind or surge. Neither to the right, nor left, nor in front for the far or near, was there a single living being to be seen. There was not so much the haughty ship of the gusshippers, celebrating the fierce rivalry of a fishing of their own. It was really these merciless fugitives who vanished without leaving any more trace of his flight would a summer cloud or evening mist; though he certainly had fled, possessing a very strong and enduring frame, to judge by the facile way in which he bore this way through the bushes.

Julien, now utterly amazed, would have thought he was dreaming, had his blinding fear and hands borne witness rather unpleasantly as to the truth of his strange adventure. He vainly tried to compose himself, tried the several reasons on all the suppositions they presented themselves, but could not find any rational conclusion. The meadow land was so small, still it was too far off for the man to have reached it. There was the question which he must have retained bounding to recollect. But, since his eyes were blinded, he could not see. He could have imagined this man was calling some little noise, and M. de la Chauterie, perfectly sure that he had heard nothing beyond the murmur of the wind gradually dying away over the open ground.

Julien was about to search the open wood, when, in passing the ditch he found a man sitting on the ground. He said that he had just met unexpectedly the fugitive. Amid a clump of bushes he found a bundle rather well wrapped up with an air of the sort of feeling on Crusoe, in which one has bent down to search for the print of human footsteps he had in his desert island. This bundle which had evidently been made up in a hurry, had a large case and contained such a workman's coat, shirt, and clothes. There was also a large check cotton kerchief, having two strange round holes, of precisely the same size. The workman's trousers of green were torn to shreds, leaving no doubt as he pursued his flight had run over a wall. The bundle had everything with them, while searching the bushes, and he had just rid himself of them, so as to escape the better, or rather so as to alter his manner, and thus conceal his progress. The handkerchief with the strange round holes saved him a mask, so as to conceal his face, at the same time his free use of his eyes. Julien remembered that this mode of concealment was frequently resorted to by poachers in order to avoid being recognised by keepers, and he asked himself whether he were not on track of some assassin, or that fellow Robert, the miserable procreant of the *maison de la Chauterie*. At any rate the discovery was an important one, it was possible someone might recognise these tattered garments: it was best, however, to try and catch their owner at once.

He crossed the ditch which had thus so speedily divested himself of his clothing, finding that his prisoner was a thin man, could evidently not have been very far; still where could his hiding place be? The spot was ill suited for purposes of ambush, as he and the wood, the ground was open. However, it occurred to Julien that the rogue might easily have slipped into the water, have gone down the river, swimming along close the shore, and have landed when he thought himself safe. At this point there was nothing unlikely about such a performance, only it would be the swimmer to dry himself in the sun before starting on his road again. By making haste M. de la Chauterie might yet surprise him in the am. So he lost no time, and leaving the old clothes where he had found

them, rapidly crossed the path and ran towards the river's bank. He was about to descend it when on giving a glance below him, he stopped short, rivetted to the ground with surprise. At this spot the bank was almost perpendicular, but a few paces up the river it sloped gently down, and formed a grassy margin edged by clumps of rushes and shaded by a few alder trees with knotty trunks. The spot seemed expressly contrived for resting and musing, flirtation, or a quiet day's angling: but on this occasion it was occupied by an individual who was neither a dreamer nor a lover, nor even a persecutor of unhappy gudgeon.

Seated on a camp-stool and sheltered by an immense sunshade fixed erect in the soft soil, this lover of nature's beauty confronted a canvas resting on a portable easel. In his left hand he held a palette, and in his right a brush which he dabbled with most energetically. His head moved up and down incessantly, with the almost automatic motion so common to landscape painters who are obliged to glance alternately at their colour, their picture, and the site they are painting. Julien saw little more of the man's face than a bit of curly whisker, but he had a full view of his costume, which appeared to him irreproachably fresh and elegant. A fine straw hat with a blue ribbon, a puggaree like officers wear in Algeria, striped trousers of some light textile fabric, gaiters of the same material, and patent leather shoes—such was the garb worn by this artist—an artist such as one does not meet with every day, for he looked as if he had just stepped out of a bandbox; and his get-up was so unlike that of a professional painter, that Julien became suspicious the moment he caught sight of him.

However, if the stranger hardly looked like a genuine artist, he in no wise resembled a robber of the woods, and it was absurd to think that a man so faultlessly attired could have emerged from the thorny underbrush of Belière. The blouse and trousers found in the roadside ditch were not sufficiently strong to have served as armour and protected the exquisite suit of clothes worn by the gentleman in question. And then those patent leather shoes! They would most certainly have remained in the thickets, if their owner had by any chance been the same man as the one whom Julien had so energetically pursued. On the other hand, what an eccentric idea for a landscape painter to choose the noontide heat as a suitable time for painting in the open air, when the vertical rays of the sun naturally destroy all effect of light and shade, and spoil the aspect of even the most exquisite scenery!

The young advocate had some acquaintance with the artistic world, and he was certainly amazed at this predilection for noontide; moreover, what particularly struck him, was that this chance meeting coincided with the disappearance of the fugitive. A ragged tramp had vanished into mid-air at the very moment when Julien hoped to capture him. A freshly attired painter appeared on the scene at this exact moment, and almost on the very spot where the other had disappeared. Such things only happen in *Cinderella*, *Aladdin*, or fairy stories of the kind, in which gourts are changed into grand carriages, or beggars into princes, by a simple touch of the magician's wand. But the bare banks of the Marne, and the ditch bordering the towing-path, could not be suspected of harbouring *genii* of the kind. M. de Chanterrie was perfectly aware of it, and yet he could not help suspecting this unknown individual.

At all events, the artist must have been deeply absorbed in his work to have remained quite undisturbed amid all the noise made so close to him,

as the crashing of the branches in the wood, the tramp's flying along path, and more especially the cries which Julien had raised; all this it to have attracted his attention, and yet he had not budged! He had red the scoundrel time to change his clothes without even condescending to move from his seat, while only fifty paces away there were shouts of "lp!" and "Murder!" Was it possible that he had not heard anything? Surely not; the only explanation of it could be that this painter was d with a remarkable amount of composure; unless, indeed, as there was g reason for thinking, there were some mystery in the whole affair.

Julien, who was inclined to take the latter view of the case, wished to his mind of the doubts he had, so he rapidly walked along the river, and when overlooking the spot where the painter sat, busy at his k, he began calling to him, "If you please, Monsieur!"

The man turned his head without hurrying himself, however, and displayed a cool and emotionless face, unknown to M. de la Chanterie, though and an instinct recalled the form of having seen it somewhere before. Then, glancing at the person who had called him, the artist shrugged his lders and resumed his work, with perfect unconcern. The impertinence e proceeding was obvious, and it made Julien furious, just as he especially needed to retain all his self-possession. To tell the truth this individual ted him, as he might have treated any tramp on the highway, whom he d not deign to answer. Now, the high wife of the Count de Brennes had ys more in the best society, where such manners are never tolerated, n moreover, being very hot-headed, he immediately forgot all about his uit, in order to give a lesson in good breeding to the clown who dared eat him in that style. With three rapid strides he reached his side, said to him somewhat roughly: "I have already spoken once to you, and shall be obliged by your replying to me."

The imperturbable landscape painter looked him straight in the face, and n to whistle in a low key, but he did not utter one word, and, indeed, as ag in turning to his work, when Julien, quite exasperated, stretched his hand to seize him by the collar. Immediately and with the greatest ility, this silent personage transferred his paint-brush to his left l, and then with the right one drew from his pocket a revolver with an y handle, which he levelled at the head of the person who had so ly dared to disturb him.

The hasty young advocate was on the point of closing with his antagonist. This Yankee reception only served to increase his rage, and the village hardly narrowly escaped being the site of a second tragedy as deadly as e of the previous evening; however, a sudden ray of good sense showed en the futility of engaging in a struggle without arms, or witnesses, and n an exasperated man who was a quick hand at revolver practice; ordinally, with the greatest possible effort, he controlled himself for a e. "Ah! sir," he said, "I won't give you a pretext for murdering me, ou seem anxious to do, but I swear that things won't stop like this ven us, and you will have to give me satisfaction for your insolence." his time the silent painter replied by a sarcastic sneer, and replacing revolver in his pocket, he said: "Give you satisfaction? To you?" Yes, to me, sir, when do you then take me for?" exclaimed M. de la nterie, stupefied by this reply.

"I take you for a mad-man. Just now, I took you for a beggar or a mp."

His cool reply made Julien reflect for a moment. That he appeared

something like a madman was quite possible ; and it was equally possible that he looked like a beggar or a tramp ; to convince himself of the fact, had only to glance at the wretched state of his clothes. Mademoiselle Brannes's daring champion had quite forgotten the fact that, in striving to accomplish the task set him by his enthusiastic cousin, Gabrielle, he had reduced himself into a pitiable condition. With his tattered clothes he had the picturesque appearance of the tattered raiments of Callot's etchings, and it was impossible to guess that his garments had come from a fashionable tailor. His trousers were torn from the ankle upwards in jagged rents, while his sleeves were gashed like those of a doublet of the time of Francis I. Moreover, his scratched face, his skinned hands, his hair tangled with blades of grass and dry leaves like the head of a sylvan deity, really made him closely resemble what you would call a prowler of the woods, or something worse. He was obliged to confess that his foul appearance was not calculated to inspire a man so correctly attired with either respect or confidence, and, accordingly, he answered in a softer key :

"I readily believe, sir, that the state of my apparel may have prejudiced you against me, but my face and language suffice, I think, to convince you of your error, and when I have told you my name —"

"I have not the least wish to know it," interrupted the painter, who was again working at his picture harder than ever ; "I am quite ready to overlook the misunderstanding, since you state that it is one, but I see no necessity to prolong the conversation."

"Be it so!" answered Julien drily. "I don't care any more than you do to continue the conversation ; but I have some information to ask of you, and beg you to give me it at once. You must have seen a man running past you a few minutes ago?"

"I have seen nobody ; for the very good reason, that I have not stirred from my present seat. As it is ten feet lower than the road, it is quite impossible for me to see anything going on above."

"But, at least, you must have heard him running?"

"Possibly, I might even say probably ; only I did not pay the least attention to the sound, having no more reason to bother about the man you speak of, than about the person on horseback whom I hear coming along."

"A man on horseback!" exclaimed Julien, "perhaps he has met the very fellow."

"Well, the rider is approaching us, and at the pace he is going he will reach us in two or three minutes' time," said the artist coolly, "I advise you to obtain your information from him ; as for myself, I can give you no assistance whatever."

Julien neither replied nor stirred. He listened to the clatter of horse hoofs coming at a trot from the direction of the meadow, and rapidly approaching ; and he determined to detain the rider for a moment when he came up, but he had not yet done with the landscape painter. Everything about this man seemed suspicious to Julien ; his mania for painting in the noontide heat, his insolence at their first meeting, and his affected indifference as to what was passing around him. It was indeed enough to make one believe that the clothes thrown into the ditch really belonged to him, that he had found time to rid himself of them, and place himself with brush in hand, on his camp-stool, while his enemy was struggling in the thicket where he had so unluckily fallen.

M. de la Chanterie examined the painter with a critical eye, but there was not the slightest disorder about his attire—not even a crease in his

front and not a scratch on his skin: while his hair and whiskers as curly as could be as if he had just left a barber's shop. Besides, examination of his shoes sufficed to dispel all suspicion of a race through woods. These pumps shined brightly in the sunlight, and like the tiger's silk socks, drawn on as tight as a pair of gloves, they could not have come in contact with brambles. A man so sprucely attired could not in any way be identified with the fugitive; only it was possible he was acquainted with the latter, and so it was necessary for Julien to lose sight of him until he had ascertained who he was, where he came from, and why he was at Chirly. The moment seemed opportune for the young advocate to renew his enquiries, for the horseman was now near and, to serve as a witness, and to render assistance in case of any violent reaction.

"Well, sir," resumed Julien, "I shall not fail to follow your advice in respecting the thief now approaching: but pending his arrival, I must beg you to explain how it happened that you did not hear me when I shouted 'order!' with all the strength I could muster."

"No doubt because the east wind carried your voice in an opposite direction," said the painter in a peculiar tone, and appearing more absorbed than ever in lightening the sky of his painting.

"Very well; but it is no longer blowing from that direction, and pray, understand that we are discussing a serious crime."

"Nonsense, you don't really mean it?"

"Yes; because the nature of which I have been passing, or if it was not it was at any rate one of his accomplices."

"You are a police officer then?"

"No, sir; but it is the duty of every honestable man to further the cause of justice: that I feel I am bound to at the present moment, and don't you think that, if I am wrong, I shall have a right to say that you are taking the criminal's side."

"What criminal?"

"The one who hastily rushed out of the wood but a quarter of an hour ago, and who must needs have passed close to you."

"I have already told you I saw nothing and heard nothing, and that I said nothing whatever about any person; but I confess you end by tiring my curiosity somewhat. What crime has the poor devil committed to make you hunt him down like a rabbit?"

"A murder."

"What! someone has been killed in the wood yonder, and only just this minute?"

"No: it was yesterday evening that someone was killed, and not on this side of the wood. But the criminal returned just now to recover a serious piece of evidence which he had carelessly and imprudently left on the very spot where his victim lay; it was he who came with him, however; when he lived I pursued him, and was just upon him, when my foot slipped —"

"Do you know, sir, your story really begins to interest me?" said the painter quite gravely, "May I ask you what this serious piece of evidence is?"

"A letter, sir, a letter addressed to him, and which he used as a gun."

"How do you know that?"

"I know it because I have found the letter in question, and what is more I have it in my pocket-book, and I will undertake to find out the person who

penned it even if I have to make every resident of Charly write before me one after the other."

At this moment the horseman whom the young advocate had momentarily forgotten arrived upon the scene, and began shouting loudly:

"Julien ! Julien !"

M. de la Chanterie turned round and perceived his cousin, Captain Henri de Brames, mounted on a magnificent half-bred mare, which he with difficulty kept in at a walk.

"What the devil are you up to there?" ejaculated the officer, "And where do you come from? You look like Frederick Lemaitre playing the Auberge des Adrets. Whatever made you get yourself up like that? Has anyone been trying to murder you too?"

Delighted at being reinforced in the person of his cousin and friend Julien was about to reply by a statement on the whole business, but Henri did not give him time. Scarcely did he espy the landscape painter than he bowed to him with marked politeness, and then dismounting, led his horse forward by the bridle saying: "I beg your pardon, sir, but I did not see you, and so little expected to find you here—but I am all the more glad of it, as I have just called at your house."

"I regret," said the painter, "that you should have done so to no purpose, but I left home early this morning and——"

"Oh, really! with your leave I will call again shortly," interrupted the captain, "but I must first introduce to you my cousin Julien de la Chanterie; unless he be already known to you."

"This is the first time I have had the pleasure of meeting this gentleman."

"Then I am delighted to have an opportunity of introducing him to you, Monsieur de la Chanterie, advocate and doctor of laws," continued Henri, pushing his relative gently forward, and to complete the introduction he said, "Monsieur Wassmann, an officer in the service of His Majesty the Emperor of Austria, and our near neighbour."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Julien, "You are the gentlemen living at the Pavillon des Sorbiers."

"Yes, sir," said the stranger, bowing, "and had I been aware I had the honour of speaking to the nephew of the Count de Brames, my reception would have been a very different one, I beg of you to believe it, but I could not guess who you were, dressed as you are."

"Of course not!" resumed Henri, "I don't understand it myself. Come my dear cousin, what has happened to you?"

"A most peculiar business," answered Julien with a glance at M. Wassmann, "I was walking in the Bélière woods, near the very spot where poor Michel was murdered, when I heard sounds of footsteps. I called out, but whoever it was, instead of replying, hurried off; whereupon I pursued the fugitive through the thicket, but he ended by rushing out of the wood in this direction before I could come up with him."

"And you saw no one on leaving the wood?"

"No one excepting this gentleman."

"What do you mean——"

"Well," said M. Wassmann, smiling, "I had been here about an hour painting this lovely bend of the river—I have a passion you know for spoiling canvas over things of this sort—and this harmless taste of mine caused Monsieur de la Chanterie to take me, so I fear, for a dreadful criminal."

"Really!" exclaimed the captain. "The *quid pro quo* is most amusing

you must not be angry with my cousin. This abominable murder has led the heads of every one up at the château, and we think of nothing inquests, criminal investigations, and all that sort of thing—

Oh! There is no need of any apology," interrupted the stranger, most graciously; "but I fancied I had heard that the guilty person had been caught."

Yes, yes, we have him right enough, thank heaven!"

But he may have accomplices," said Julien warmly.

Quite so," seconded M. Wassmann, "and every effort should be made to them: indeed I hope that the authorities will succeed in catching them, this crime has aroused the indignation of all Charly. At the moment it was committed, at nine o'clock, yesterday evening, I chanced to be in a village in the village, and on my way home I learned the news. All the people I met in the streets were cursing the murderer."

Indeed, sir," now exclaimed Julien, "you were aware that one of my father's keepers had been killed last evening, and yet just now, when I questioned you respecting a man who had escaped me, you refused to give me any answer?"

Allow me to remark," gently said M. Wassmann, "that I was utterly unacquainted with you, and further, that you had previously addressed me in somewhat excited terms."

This change of tone made M. de la Chatrie reflect. A well-bred man never quite indignant to moderation of language and politeness of manner; but Julien, so irritated for a short time previously, now began to ask himself if he had not mistaken the stranger. However, this thought was quickly set aside when he remembered the peculiar manner of the gentleman-painter when they first met. Accordingly the young advocate decided to reserve his attacks for the present, and yet to have a proper explanation on the subject from his whole interview. "I regret, sir," he said, with perfect politeness of manner, though it must be owned, rather coolly, "I regret having lost my temper to such a point, but under the circumstances perhaps it was not altogether unreasonable. As for my part, I was equally ignorant of your name, and I certainly could not guess it from the very evasive language in which you couched your replies." And I confess, that I cannot understand why, as you know of the murder, I saw the gamekeeper, and made me relate all I knew about it, you yourself being acquainted with these particulars."

"Excuse me," said M. Wassmann, "I only knew the public report, and the questions you put to me were not calculated to throw any light on the subject. You spoke at the same time about a letter you had found in the road, and of a run-away man who must have passed close here——"

"I am perfectly sure that he passed," broke in Julien.

"And I am equally sure that I never saw him. Besides it can be easily explained. The man you pursued can easily have gone down the ring-path or have escaped into the meadow land without my seeing him, was absorbed with my painting, and I took no notice of what went on around me. But now I think of it, if the fugitive went in that direction, de Brannes must have met him." As the foreigner spoke he pointed his finger towards a clump of trees which hid the Pavillon des Sorbiers.

"I met nobody," said the captain, "nobody, I came by the high road all the way."

"Then the scoundrel must have kept to the river bank," ejaculated M. Wassmann, with perfect composure, "and farther on he no doubt took the road back to Paris."

"I renounce running after him for the present, but not discovering him eventually, for he has left certain things behind him, which will greatly assist in securing his conviction, when he is captured," said Julien, emphatically accentuating the latter part of his speech.

"I sincerely hope that you will find him," said M. Wassmann, "and I deeply regret that I cannot continue this interesting conversation, but I see a carriage coming this way and recognise the action of the trotters, which I bought only last year from the secretary of the Russian Legation. It is my daughter coming to take me to Paris. So you will excuse me, gentlemen, for leaving you, and I hope you will do me the pleasure of coming some evening to smoke a cigar with me; I have some first-class ones, which my friend of mine, a ship captain, lately brought me from Havannah, and I can offer you some *kummel* also, sent me by our consul at Riga."

"Most willingly," replied Henri de Brannes, although his cousin was nudging him.

"If I had not feared committing an indiscretion," continued the foreigner, "I should long ago have paid my respects at the Château de Chasseneuil, but I request you, captain, to tell your father, that I hope to do so to-morrow."

"My father will feel highly flattered, I am sure," stammered the young officer.

"My daughter, Catherine, would be most happy to make the acquaintance of Mademoiselle de Brannes."

This time the captain hesitated to make a direct reply, for he was by no means too sure of his father's acquiescence in such arrangements, and he knew that Gabrielle was not at all desirous of Mademoiselle Wassmann's society. So he merely bowed while the foreigner turned to Julien and said, "I shall be delighted, Monsieur, to meet you again at Monsieur de Brannes' and trust you will kindly keep me informed respecting the progress of the investigation. I take an interest in the case, and hope that, thanks to you, the culprit will be punished, as he deserves."

La Chanterie reddened with anger, and merely replied with an inarticulate grunt, which M. Wassmann pretended to take for a polite acknowledgment.

However, the Russian trotters had come at such a pace that the carriage, a light and elegant victoria, coloured a pale blue, now drew up near them. Julien's ill humour did not prevent him from glancing at it, and he saw a very charming young woman seated in it, carelessly lounging back among the cushions and shaded by a white parasol. Mademoiselle Wassmann appeared a hundred times prettier to him than he had anticipated. He had expected to see some fresh, chubby, fair-haired *fraulein*, and he now admired a tall, slender girl, with nut-brown hair, dark gentle eyes, a pale complexion, clear cut regular features, and a wistful expression of face. These charms certainly did not bear comparison with the aristocratic beauty of Gabrielle de Brannes, but Julien felt more inclined to forgive his cousin's intimacy with the father of this foreign marvel.

M. Wassmann had beckoned to a tall footman, seated beside the coachman, and the easel, palette, paint brushes, canvas, and, in fact, the entire artistic paraphernalia, were quickly and neatly got together, and enclosed in a box seemingly made on purpose to hold them under the seat of the carriage. The owner of all these fine things did not think it necessary to introduce his daughter to the cousins. He merely shook hands with the captain, made a friendly bow to the advocate, and having taken his place beside his daughter

a parting "Till we meet again, gentlemen," which Henri was delighted and which Julien considered highly impudent, he was soon out of . The fascinating Catherine had merely made a slight bow, but her had sparkled through the lace of her parasol, and they were not then had upon M. de la Chanterie.

The victorina shot out of sight like an arrow, and the cousins remained g each other and looking somewhat embarrassed. Julien, whose head full of facts, precedents, arguments, and conjectures, realised he had had the best of it in his bout with the foreigner. Henri reflected that had made too forward a move in promising M. Wassmann a warm reception at his father's château, not that he in the least believed in any dark ruses on the part of this foreigner, but because he knew that the count firm preconceived opinions on the question of social intercourse.

Captain Henri de Brannes was indeed a thoughtless made-up kind of w, and had he come into the world a century previously, he would have a good figure in the military household of King Louis XV., whom more one of his ancestors had served. He possessed all the requisite physical advantages for shining at such a court as that of France was in the gay eighteenth century: a slim figure, an aristocratic cast of countenance, eyes specially calculated to express the most tender passions and most energetic, a small hand, arched foot, strength, dexterity, and grace of movement. Moreover, he possessed all the old-time wit and bravery, the former natural and the latter gay, he had escaped that modern failing called "posing admiration," and he was not at all inclined to be unduly sentimental. Generous, like a real grand *seigneur* of the old school, fond of women, and a fighting man, this Captain Charming was adored by his comrades, quoted by his superiors as a most promising officer; but the life of an *à-de-camp* was hardly suited to him in times of peace, and pending a campaign what would bring him plenty of barrels, he had indulged in any number of follies. The greatest he could now commit would be to marry against his father's will. The count paid all his gambling debts without murmur, and shut his eyes to duels and passing love affairs, but he would never forgive a misalliance. Henri had happily not yet come to that; there was nothing tragic about his passion for the German beauty of the *Millon des Soldats*; indeed, most hopeful of symptoms, he was still as ever. "I say, Julien," he exclaimed, twirling his long fair moustache. "I bet you never saw a prettier girl than that?"

"Possibly not," retorted Julien, "but I never saw a man I disliked more than her honoured father."

"Pooh! he is only like every German you ever saw. Are you going to maintain that he is a brigand in disguise, as you told him to his face a few minutes ago, or something very like it?"

"If I did so, it was because I had my reasons. You speak of disguises, when you have just seen what I found over yonder in the ditch —"

"A disguise! Do you mean those boots?" asked the captain, pointing with his hunting crop to something floating on the water.

"Fools sometimes have keener eyesight than serious people, and Julien had yet discerned the floating object, which his giddy young cousin had just pointed out to him. This object, which came along gently with the current, hugging the bank, and at times delayed in its course by the rushes, this object, unsuited to navigation, was, indeed, a high leather boot, of the kind worn as Hessians. The young lawyer rushed towards this new piece of evidence, with an energy which made Henri de Brannes burst into laughter.

To get hold of it, Julien was obliged to wade in the water up to his knees and splash and bend about in the most laughable fashion. Fortunately, Gabrielle was not there to witness her cavalier bearing everything, even ridicule, in the execution of her orders. The intrepid young fellow was at least well rewarded for his pains. The boot was of yellow supple leather, and without all appearance of foreign make. It was not provided with spurs, but it bore numerous traces of recent and repeated contact with sharp stones, thorny wood, and other sharp cutting substances. It had evidently not been used for riding, but had done duty as a cuirass to protect somebody's leg while hastening along a rough path. Whose leg? One of M. Wassmann's undoubtedly, and this explained the immaculate condition of the patent leather shoes and silk socks, which had completed his get up as an amateur painter. Whilst Julien turned the boot over and over, the captain roared with laughter. "It really is too bad," he said at length, "do you want to collect stray boots and shoes, or play Brasseur's part in the *Vie Parisienne*?"

But Julien paying no attention to jokes, exclaimed—"The other! I must get the other!"

As chance had it the other was not far off. Julien found it sticking in the mud, ten paces above the spot where the painter had fixed his easel. Both boots must have been thrown in the water there, precipitately, and they had afterwards been parted by the current, which had ended by carrying one of them away. M. de la Chanterie came back with his singular trophy, more delighted than if he had carried the head of some giant slain by his own hand, for the sake of Gabrielle's beautiful eyes.

"Come, my fine friend," said Henri de Brannes, "pray tell me what you mean to do with those venerable old kettles!"

"Come on, and I will soon show you," replied Julien gravely. And thereupon he climbed up the bank, crossed the road and jumped down into the ditch bordering the Belicre woods. The captain leading his horse by the bridle followed, and saw his cousin throw the boots upon a bundle of ragged clothes.

"You see these rags?" said Julien, "Well, the boots complete them, then man I pursued through the road wore all this toggery, in order not to be recognised; he undressed here in the ditch in half a second, and took off his boots on the banks of the Marne. Is that clear?"

"As clear as you like. I don't deny that some scoundrel of a poacher, and accomplice of Michel's murderer if you like, let you pursue him to no purpose, but I will never believe that a gentleman several times a millionaire amuses himself by killing my father's keepers and playing *Fra Diavolo* in the vicinity of Paris."

Julien might have replied to the point, but he quite understood that the charms of Mademoiselle Wassmann would influence Henri sufficiently to prevent him from yielding to evidence, so instead of trying to convince him, he resolved to content himself by getting as much useful information out of him as he possibly could. He was quite decided to act alone, without assistance and without confidant, and he even concluded that it would be prudent not to show the captain the letter which had served the murderer as a gun-wad, and which he now had in his pocket. "My dear Henri," he said, with affected calmness, "I have no more inclination than yourself to accuse Monsieur Wassmann. His daughter is really too pretty to have a scoundrel for a father, only I have a clue which I intend to follow up."

"How the deuce is it that you have such a taste for detective duty? Why not keep quiet, now that the rascally poacher is captured?"

"Because I am perfectly certain he had some accomplices, or one at the

"Well, and what does it matter to you? It's the business of the judges, clerks, and other men of the gown."

"And ours too, more or less, for my uncle is particularly anxious that an

"All right, my friend, providing you don't fancy you recognise the guilty in every person you meet, and above all, providing you don't cast stones

"Heaven forbid! but tell me Henri, you are really hard hit then?"

"Never more seriously in my life, my dear fellow. She is pretty enough

"I quite agree with you. She is a marvel of beauty and grace, which

"That depends: what kind of engagement do you mean?"

"I want to know if there is any question of a marriage between yourself

"He could not give a reply, bit the corners of his moustache, and

"He ceased to be giving a reply, bit the corners of his moustache, and

"He cared for must have been dressmakers."

"I don't want to ask for Le Châtelier to prove that he set his

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"That's a point which the Comte de Brumes wouldn't take into consid-

"Anyhow, we have not come to that yet, and it is quite possible

"That would be still worse, but it seems to me things have gone further

"Well, what of it? What if he does come to the Château? I see nothing

"I have strong reasons for thinking my uncle and cousin won't be of your

"And why?"

"Because like you and me they belong to a circle of society in which

Henri, tell me frankly, where did you come across this foreigner, and what guarantee do you possess of his honourability?"

"My dear fellow," said the young officer, warmly, "I beg of you to believe I should not associate with Monsieur Wassmann if I were not perfectly well informed respecting him. He has this winter been elected a member of my club, which, as you know, is a select one, and there was not a single black ball against him. Our president obtained the necessary information about him at the Austrian embassy. Wassmann was a major in the Austrian army, in a regiment of cuirassiers, I believe, and he left the service quite recently to manage his fortune. He owns mines in Bohemian land in Moravia, and capital all over the place. He is a widower with an only daughter, who is charming, as you have just seen. In fine he is a gentleman of old family."

"Really, with this bootmaker's name?"

"What's in a name? You surely don't pretend, Mr. Advocate, that you know the German peerage by heart?"

"No, my dear fellow, and I willingly grant that this foreigner possesses every advantage that you mention, including that of descending from a crusader, still it may not be as easy for you to convince your father and sister, and——"

"Good, I will look out for that, but what the devil are you up to now?"

"I am only picking up all this toggery, which I am going to take home as a memento of my man-hunt."

"You are off then?"

"Well, I don't care to put in an appearance at the Château in my present plight, so I shall take the train to Paris and come back here to dinner. Say nothing about all this to my uncle. It's useless."

"Nor to Gabrielle either, eh? don't be alarmed."

"Ah! by-the-bye has M. Wassmann a residence at Paris?"

"Yes, a magnificent mansion, Rue de Presbourg, 44."

"I only ask you that because he can perhaps give me some information may require at once."

"He will give it you if he can; whatever you choose to think of him, he's really a very worthy fellow," said the captain, who had just remounted his horse, and thereupon he pricked spurs and shouted to his cousin by way of farewell, "Good luck to you, my worthy private detective! Till this evening!"

V.

A WEEK had elapsed since the murder of the gamekeeper and quietude again prevailed in the village, momentarily upset by the shocking tragedy. Poor Michel's fate still formed a subject of conversation at the café of the Grand-Vainqueur, between the games of dominoes, but politics were rapidly reasserting their rights to the foremost place in the discussions. It is true, however, that during the first days which followed upon the murder the frequenters of Mademoiselle Rose's establishment had chattered to their hearts' content about the doings of the legal authorities, exhausting all comments thereon, and carefully sifting every possible conjecture as to the poacher's guilt or innocence. They had, indeed, done all this to such a degree that Mademoiselle Rose, with her sensitive disposition, had undergone terrible suffering; she was, perforce, obliged to hear the dissertations of Verduron,

jurisconsult to restrain the world's appetite, called for harshly by the Civil Code; and the horrible crimes of the guillotine were multiplied, at ten times the rate, by the former command. In fact, the favorite landlady was at last obliged to entreat these gentlemen to have consideration for her nerves, and to speak less frequently about dissection, the galleys, and the guillotine.

the galleys, and the guillotine. After laughing at what they called her high-sounding sentiments, they ended by according to her request, the more readily, as they perceived her mind was now made up as to her future career. The guilt of the prisoner was no longer doubted by any one, and there was unanimous praise of the manner in which the servants of the government had conducted the inquiry. The rigid old chemist alone took exception from the crime to obtain a just application of the laws which he still regarded as founded in justice, which he accused of inflicting the punishment. However, Michel, who he had not recognised, kept pace of him. She was talking away vigorously, she complained of her faded dress, and at that time, when she had the joy to walk to her friend Jacques de Launay, who, herself, had no reason to feel ill at heart. The death of her cousin Michel had been a terrible blow to her. She could not forgive herself for having been too late to save him on that fatal evening, and was ever bewailing the fact that fate had put so many hindrances in her way, and prevented her from coming the unlucky day in time. Jacques had also further reasons for taking to her his trial. He not only regretted partly to the child from Fourchambault. In his last moments, however, he had even declared should take him back to Paris, and he fully intended to do so. He would naturally protest that he was against the law, but to the authorities after a month he would have been out of prison and at home at work.

After a month's trial, it was found that the old man was not willing to work. Israel, however, pressed him to continue, and more willing; he had gum work by grinding the rose trees and watching the honey, but he was growing visibly weaker, and he could already do a little. The large priest came for tea, and he saw some young people; and he gazed at the pictures hanging, and he saw some old men crowded to him, and he was, once more, to set the pictures on the wall with old John. The latter, however, was not so hearty, and he did a few what he thought of as "light" pictures, but he had not finished the last of them on the floor, when he was called to his house. He told himself he was a feeble old man, and that he did not like pictures; but he was so old, and had such a poor face, that he had long been to be ve in.

ve in.
The curé of the village did not fail to convert him, as every parish priest; only, he then, in the name of the good Father Leveillé, who had been called to the village, he said, he would go to him to-morrow. The father of the little boy, who was named after M. de La Vallée, and even took pleasure in his conversion, was a good man, who had a very small number of tenants, than his own family. In the winter, he attended a village priest, that priest travelled all over the country; and if you were an English, you took an oddity at a word of noise. The Leveillé family replied that they would allow him time to do so; his duty upon the case when the latter tried to show his loyalty to the king, and thereupon intimated that M. de La Vallée was killed by the soldiers of the Republic; hospital to advise him, however, to keep still, and not to display of aristocracy—it was a young March when he started to in this pompous phrase. The gardener strictly declared that the king had not

even the merit of common sense, as the priest lived in very simple style and not at all like a subsidised individual. He even added that to his own knowledge M. Jean imposed the hardest privations on himself so as to render help to the poor, whereupon the chemist exclaimed with indignation that giving alms was encouraging mendicity. To cut a long story short, Digonnard was completely beaten; the gardener continued to receive M. Jean, and indeed under the influence of his advice he began to look more kindly on the poor young foundling.

Such was the state of matters on the Monday of the week following the crime. That morning, the curé of Charly, who, the previous evening had received a summons to appear before the examining magistrate in Paris, came at an early hour to pay a short visit to Marcel, and was agreeably surprised to find Antoine Cormier, the cabinet-maker of the Faubourg St. Antoine, at Ledoux' house. This was not the first time that the priest and Cormier had met since journeying together in the omnibus between the Madeleine and the Bastille, for on the day following Michel's murder, M. Jean had revisited the house in the Rue de Charonne. Having on his own responsibility obtained permission for the poacher's wife to remain at liberty, he had immediately thought of this house as a fit place to settle the poor woman, at the same time recommending her to the care of the Cormiers. The plan was at once carried out. M. Jean was well known in Paris to several rich and pious families, and had only to mention a case of trouble to obtain immediate assistance. Thus within twenty-four hours a respectable lodging was rented and furnished for the poor street-singer and her children, on the fifth floor of the house in which the Cormier family resided. In the cabinet-maker and his wife she found new friends, almost relations; and as she knew how to embroider skilfully, she speedily obtained orders for work, thanks to the priest's exertions. She was thus placed in a position to earn her own and her children's living. Before doing more for her the priest was anxious to become more fully acquainted with her past life, and so far he had had no time to question her. On finding Antoine Cormier at the Ledoux' house, he concluded that the cabinet-maker brought news of some kind respecting the poacher's wife, and in this respect he was not mistaken. Cormier, who had just arrived by the first train, was still exchanging words of greeting with Jacqueline and Marcel, when M. Jean entered the house. The cabinet-maker's face lit up with pleasure the moment he saw the worthy priest, whom he approached with both hands outstretched.

"You mustn't be offended at my not having gone straight to your house, your reverence," said he; "I promised my wife and little ones that my first visit should be for this youngster, Marcel."

"And I should like to know why you never brought your wife and little ones with you?" exclaimed Jacqueline.

"Louise can't possibly leave the house just now," replied the cabinet-maker, with a certain sadness of manner, which did not escape the priest.

"Well, I shall expect them on Monday next, that is if you are not too busy just now, and meanwhile you must take some breakfast with us. Pierre hasn't come back from the market yet, but he'll be here in an hour or so, and glad to see you, I'm sure of it."

"Thanks, but I can't stop, Madame Ledoux," said Cormier; "no, I can't possibly stop to-day, as I have a lot of business with a manufacturer in the Faubourg; I only came here this morning to see his reverence; but don't be alarmed, we shall be back before the week's out, for unluckily work doesn't keep us in doors just now."

"Have you anything urgent to tell me, my friend?" asked M. Jean in an undertone.

Oh! it's only about that poor woman, and it won't take very long; but——” If it's anything private I'm going out of the way,” interrupted Jacqueline; “ve something to see to in the garden with the lad.” And thereupon she fled off Marcel, without waiting for a reply.

Have you any bad news about that unhappy creature and her children?” the priest now asked Cormier.

No, no; the children are wonderfully well, and the mother is not ill, for works night and day, but she particularly wishes to see you at once, and as I dared not write to you, she implored me so urgently to come and see you I couldn't refuse her.”

It happens well, as business takes me to Paris this very day; but have you any idea what she wishes to say to me?”

“No, not the faintest idea. Still I think it must be in reference to her wretched husband, for she is always thinking and talking about him. It's no use for Louise or myself to argue with her, she tenaciously maintains that he's perfectly innocent: that he has a bad head, but a good heart: that it was great injustice to have sent him to prison, and that if the jury are not unduly influenced he will be acquitted.”

“Alas! I greatly fear that she is deceived,” murmured M. Jean.

“So do I; but what is one to do? I haven't strength to contradict her; and I'm no wife less than myself: her heart is full of fancies. Would you believe she goes out regularly every morning and every afternoon to stare at the walls of Mazas? She won't confess it, but Louise surprised her two or three times prowling about there. And look here, your reverence, I'll bet that if she wants to speak to you, it's to ask you to obtain permission for her to see her husband in the prison.”

“That would be a very difficult business, and I don't even know if it would be desirable, in her excited state of mind——”

At this point the priest was abruptly interrupted by the door being thrown suddenly open. It was Mademoiselle Rose who came in, Mademoiselle Rose looking excited, distracted, in fact, even more disturbed and upset than on the memorable evening when M. Wessmann had visited the Café du Grand Cinqu岸.

Antoine Cormier had never set eyes on her before, and the priest scarcely knew her, having only seen her once or twice at Jacqueline's house. They were therefore at a loss to understand why she entered the place in this tumultuous fashion, or why she appeared so agitated. The cabinet-maker fancied she was sick, while M. Jean was of opinion that a fire must have broken out at the Grand Vainpierre, or that a fresh crime had been committed in the village. However, they had no time to question the old maid, for a window of the room, overlooking the garden, was open, and Madame Ledoux, who was busy clearing rose trees of caterpillars, perceived her neighbour, and at once hastened to her door. Marcel also saw the kindly old woman, but he merely gave her a glance, and turning round, continued weeding the strawberry beds.

“Good heavens! what's the matter with you, maizelle?” exclaimed good old Jacqueline; “you are as pale as a sheet. Are we going to have a revolution, or is the mayor going to close your establishment?”

“Ah, Madame Ledoux, if it were only that!” gasped the old maid.

“Only that! You give me quite a turn! What is the matter then?”

“Ah, Madame Ledoux! Would you believe it, Piedouche the gendarme has just brought me a paper which summons me before the magistrate about a case.”

“What case?”

"The case of the poacher who killed your cousin."

"It can't be true!"

"It is exactly as I tell you, for it is written on the paper, with my name in full."

"Ah, well! After all, that's no reason for you to put yourself into such a state."

"What! no reason! Don't you realise how terrible it is for a poor woman who has done absolutely nothing to reproach herself with, to be called before a magistrate? Ah, just think of it! To be taken before a magistrate after thirty-one years of blameless life!"

Mademoiselle Rose's emotion did not prevent her from subtracting ten years from the sum total of her age, but this emotion was none the less so real and unaffected that M. Jean was amazed by it. "Why, mademoiselle," he said gently, "you are only called as a witness. There is nothing in it which can possibly injure your reputation."

"Ah, sir, but just think of it! you see how nervous I am! I shall never dare to speak, and I feel certain that I shall faint right away instead of replying to the questions."

"But why?" asked M. Jean, who could not help smiling at this display of nerves; "the magistrate who will question you has nothing terrifying about him; I have already seen him twice in his private room, and I assure you that he is a very gentle, good-natured man."

"Ah! I am sure I know so," gasped the lady in question; "but it's not only that which torments me."

"It seems to me, however, that you have nothing to fear."

"Doubtless still I can't help asking myself what they want to question me about."

"Well, it is certainly rather peculiar that you should be summoned as a witness; for, as far as I know, you were not present at that terrible business."

"I never strayed from my counter the whole evening; Madame Ledoux and my customers are at hand to prove it."

"And you don't know the prisoner?"

"I! God forbid! I know a scamp like that?" exclaimed the old maid, with vehement indignation.

"Then," said M. Jean, "I cannot make it out at all, unless it's something to do with the anonymous letter which Madame Ledoux, I believe, showed you."

"Oh, dear no! for Madame Ledoux is not summoned."

"That's true, I have received no paper," said Jacqueline; "and why *should* I receive one, since I told all I knew to the magistrate when he came to Charly, and his clerk took it all down in writing?"

"And what is still more extraordinary," continued Mademoiselle Rose, "is that all the gentlemen are summoned for to-day also; Monsieur Digonnard, the chemist, Monsieur Véillet, the mayor's assessor, Monsieur Verduron, Monsieur Cruchot, in fact all my customers."

"A further reason for not troubling yourself, my dear lady," said the priest gaily, "you will appear in good company, and I may even tell you that I shall probably meet you at the same time in the magistrate's office, or anteroom, for I am summoned to appear at two o'clock."

"Like myself and those gentlemen."

"But I have other business to attend to in Paris," replied M. Jean, "and I must start at once if I don't wish to miss my train."

"And I must go with you, your reverence," said Cormier.

adamie Ledoux vainly tried to prevent their departure, but they gave her to understand that the business they had to attend to was too important to admit of any further delay. Marcel embraced his two friends, and then they took mutual leave.

The station was not far from Ledoux's house, and by walking fast the priest and the cabinet-maker arrived in time for the train, and climbed up to the *voiture*. The morning was a magnificent one, and it was already very warm. The priest and Cormier were not sorry to choose seats where they would enjoy the benefit of the open air, not to mention the small economy effected by taking second-class coaches, a saving which neither of them were in a position to deride. "I really can neither surprise at all these shortcomings served up to us for exactly the same day and hour," said M. Jean, as the engine started puffing. "It is quite possible that something like this has been found out by God, and it may prove favorable to the cause."

"Upon my word, sir, *after the poor fellow's wife!*" exclaimed Cormier, "but I don't see the least compassion for him."

"It is always right to pity those in trouble, even when they deserve punishment."

"I don't disagree with that; only I can't help thinking that there are many other miseries who have told him that life is not worth living, and to fall in one day, instead of by suffering and death, which is so long, and he is no any number of people to take his part."

"Much less than that would take you and me," I assure you, my dear Cormier," replied M. Jean.

The cabinet-maker was now in the habit of expressing himself so bitterly, that the priest, struck by the extreme of his manner, tried to ascertain the cause of it. "Tell me, you say nothing to your wife, my friend?" he gently asked. "You seem to me rather bitter and irritated."

"Well! there's a heavy bill owing to me and I must get the money—there's the end of the road! I must find a way to get it back!"

"A pecuniary loss is a moral wound, and when a workman has secured certain degrees of comfort like you have by his toil and good conduct, he is, thank God, for ever assured against utter misery."

"Ah, your reverence, it's easy to say, for you are not acquainted with life in the suburbs! Assured against misery! Ah! who can never make sure of that in our trade."

"However, it seems to me——"

"Just now, a minute; shall I tell you how it all happens? I will show you myself how it comes about. You do a good business—during a year, or perhaps two years, and you are a little something for bad times while still living peacefully and snugly in your time; but you think it will all pass for ever. But, stop! wait! caution! in ruin, political, social, or a commercial crisis comes about, and the bankers say, and then there's nothing doing. Nothing doing! The workman who can see no other means for living and drinking those who, like myself, have previously saved up a little money, make the best they can of it, hold up their heads and say, that although luck's down for the present, it will last long. That state of things goes on for weeks and months when a bill which is to draw a great grabber of the little money he has at the bank. It is necessary to break into your capital. You would manage to live

* On the Paris circular railway I could find no first-class carriages. The second-class carriages have an upper story, as it were, in the middle of the carriage, so that, really, money is offered in and open to the breeze on either side.—TRANS.

a good while on it perhaps, but you want to buy some foreign wood, or oak, or walnut. You find a good bargain and allow yourself to be tempted. Then as soon as you are out of pocket bad luck begins. Notes of hand from your customers come back dishonoured. Say what you like, you must refund the amount. First one comes, then two, then perhaps nine or ten. Then the wholesale wood merchant comes down on you and wants his money; a rich customer, who has vowed to pay you on a certain day, writes that he has bought a pair of horses at six thousand francs, and can't settle your account for another six months; that has happened to me, I assure you. Then you get mad with anger and let things drift; instead of working you take a stroll, meet friends who entice you into *cafés* with them, the habit is soon contracted, and——"

"But *you* will never come to that, my dear Cormier, I'm sure of it."

"No one knows," said the cabinet-maker, gloomily; "but just let me finish my story, it's most curious. Very well, you begin to stupefy yourself with drink, and the little money left in your drawer at home gradually finds its way into the till at the wine shop. When there is none left you begin to pawn your valuables. Your watch goes first, then your wife's necklet, then your silver spoons and forks, if you have any. Once begun, you can't stop, it's like Panurge's sheep. You take all the clothes and linen to your *uncle's*, one garment after the other, shawls, dresses and all; the children sleep on straw and are chilled through every night. Then,—then," continued Cormier, lowering his voice, "one evening, when there's not a crust of bread left in the house, you go out so that you mayn't hear the poor little wretches crying; you have still, perhaps, a few coppers in your pocket, you swallow a big glass of beastly brandy, and then you hurry off to a bridge where there's no one passing along, you watch the water flow, and ——"

"Don't finish! my friend, I explore you, don't go on!" exclaimed M. Jean; "suicide is always an awful crime, and when a man is the father of a family and goes and kills himself it's pure cowardice."

Antoine Cormier was about to reply, but he had taken some time to sketch this gloomy picture of misery, and the train had now drawn up at the last station prior to the terminus—a station called Bel-Air. Four or five passengers only were waiting on the platform, and among them stood a woman. "Can I be mistaken?" muttered the cabinet-maker, looking more closely at her. "But no indeed! by Jove, it's she! What the deuce can she have come out here for?"

M. Jean, who did not understand the drift of these exclamations, also began gazing at the few passengers scattered over the platform, and he saw a woman, very simply clothed, climb on to the *impériale* of a carriage just in front of that in which he and Cormier were seated. As this woman ascended the stairway she turned her back towards the priest, so that he had no notion who she was; but as she reached the outside seats a front view of her was obtained, and M. Jean recognized the pale thin face of the poacher's wife. "Well, this is rather odd, certainly," he said to Cormier in an undertone, "and I don't understand any more than you do what motive brings her to this village at the gates of Paris; I don't suppose she comes here to exercise her old calling as a strolling singer."

"Oh, dear no! No fear of that!" said Cormier, "she never played the guitar in the streets for her own pleasure, and now that she can make her living in other ways she is too proud to try it again."

"Then perhaps she knows someone living at Bel-Air?"

"I should be surprised if she did, for she has never spoken of anyone to

er myself or my wife. On the contrary, she has told Louise twenty times she hasn't either a relation or even a single friend in the world."

And since she has lived in your house have you never heard of her travelling by the Vincennes line?"

I have never known of her doing so. Each time she goes out she goes towards the station certainly, but that's on the way to the prison, and we always thought she wanted to stare at the building where her husband is confined. However, we can watch where she goes on leaving the train, for she can't see us. There she is, on the outside seats like ourselves, and with no thought that we are ten yards behind her; she can't even stir without our winging it."

Heaven forbid that I should watch her secretly," said the priest, warmly; "not at all! I have no right to do so, and then it would be too painful for me to discover that she is undervaluing the sympathy I feel for her."

I shall be sorry too, for every one at home likes her, and it already seems if we had known her for ten years. We should do better to escort her to the station, and she will, perhaps, tell us where she comes from, without our asking."

You are right, my friend: besides, we sha'n't have to wait long, for here we are inside Paris."

So we are, and in front of the prison of Mazas too. Poor woman, ought to give her a turn to see that place."

The train was, indeed, now passing over the long viaduct which ends on Place de la Bastille, skirting the prison which is known by the name of *maison d'arrêt*, who tell at Austerlitz.* From the railway carriages, you look on at the prison building, the wings of which form, as it were, a kind of circular fan. The structure of Paris, on suddenly perceiving a number of buildings all radiating from a central one, and symmetrically pierced with doors, holds you arrested as if by a spell, not unmetaphorically wonders at the peculiar edifice. He is, of course, asking himself what purpose served by the little circular buildings which rise in the centre of each ward, extending between the six ribs of this strange-cut fan. In geometrical terms it would be a circle inscribed in a triangle. This circle is itself divided into several concentric circles, the outermost being enclosed all round by a railing, with at the summit of the interior circle. From above you would say a revolving disk on the ground, of which the revolving walls form the spokes, and the rotunda part the axle-tree.

These structures are, in point of fact, the prisoners' promenade places. The men come there by turns to spend an hour, as is ordered in their respective lists, for they can neither speak to nor see each other. At further they may catch a glimpse of foliage, gazing at the gravel walk. A warden goes his round, outside the railing; while in the centre a porter keeps watch in a sort of tiny lantern tower. There is no other recreation than the sight of a bird making its way through the space, or a cloud drifting across the sky. Everything is keenly and carefully watched against, with the object, so as to ensure entire separation from the living world. The *Maison de Justice*, in the depths of his visible palace, is not better protected against all contact from without than the men condemned to solitary confinement. Only, when the prison was planned, the railway line was not taken into consideration, and it was not fore-

* Valenciennes, Bâillon, Gennevilliers, Moulins, Clamart, the Clapier, and the Imperial Guard, Mazas, and the 14th Line, and Brest, are some of the 11th divisions, which have gloriously on the 2nd December, 1870, have given their name to a square, a play, and to boulevards in the vicinity of the bridge of Austerlitz.

even that a day would come when excursion trains would pass over the roofs of houses. The result has been that from the Vincennes line you look down on the exercise places—but for a moment, it is true, and in very imperfect fashion: still you can at least see them. A good glimpse may especially be obtained when you happen to occupy an outside seat, as was the case with the priest, the mechanic, and the poacher's wife.

"That unfortunate fellow is perhaps at this very minute exercising in one of those open-air cages," said M. Jean, sorrowfully, "and has no idea that the poor creature who loves him so is passing by."

"Who knows?" replied Antoine Cormier; "who knows if she has not made the journey on purpose that he may have an idea that she's near him."

"What a funny fancy!"

"Stop a minute! I don't think I've made half a bad guess. Do you see her rising from her seat; she is standing upright on the ledge of the carriage."

"Good God! she is going to kill herself!"

"No, no, she knows what she's about; just look. Ah! what did I tell you just now? Do you see? Do you see what she is doing?"

"Yes, she's holding a handkerchief in her hand, and shaking it to and fro."

"Gad! that's a signal."

"To which there is no reply; indeed, there never will be a reply."

"How do you know? As we can see the yards, nothing prevents the prisoners from seeing us, and I thought some one moved in the one over there."

"But it's already a good way off; we have passed another wing, and here comes another yard, exactly like the previous one; how can she tell which yard to look at?"

"She must know well enough, for see—she has folded up her handkerchief again, and resumed her seat."

"Well, at any rate," murmured M. Jean, giving a sigh of relief, "she has at least come to no harm; it would have been terrible to see her hanging over like that; an archway or a post, and she might have smashed her head to pieces. I shall not reach her with her imprudence, and try to make her understand what madness it is."

"Now you see the reason why she went to Bel-Air," exclaimed Cormier. "I'll make a bet that she goes there every day."

"It really seems incredible, and she must be impelled by a very powerful attachment."

"Oh! whenever some ruffian is concerned, women are always ready to make fools of themselves."

M. Jean was not inclined to dispute this argument, which the workmen would not perhaps have brought forward had he been less plagued by worrying personal affairs, for he was very busy in his own home. The priest confined himself to pitying the sad fate of the poacher's wife, driven to such extremities by the misdeeds of an unworthy husband. The conversation now absolutely came to an end, for the train was drawing up in the Paris station. Whilst the engine panted like a blown horse, and the passengers hurried towards the steps leading outside, Antoine Cormier took leave of M. Jean, saying: "Well, your reverence, there's no need for me to say anything more now, Louise is waiting for me at home to settle accounts with a money-lender who is bothering us. Our neighbour wished expressly to see you to-day, for she implored me to go to Charly and bring you back. As we have met her on the way, I have nothing more to do in the matter."

"Perhaps it will be better for me to see her alone, first of all," replied M.

n, "but I sha'n't leave Paris this evening without first calling in the Rue Charonne."

The priest and the cabinet-maker then shook hands and parted. The latter was only a few steps in front of them. M. Jean soon overtook her last comrade and went away. On seeing M. Jean, she reddened, and seemed to be ashamed of what she had said to him, and was evidently the first to protest against having done so. "I was in the train, quite near you," said the priest intentionally.

"You saw him, then?" she asked, her face still redder in the face.

"Yes, and I can't help telling you that you frightened and distressed me somewhat."

"Why? Is it because for me to try to catch a glimpse of him?"

"What! I am not sure of it, but your manner is rather inconsistent, and I think, telling you that it would be well for you to employ your time in other ways."

"It is a fault to rob my poor friend an hour of his sleep, I make up for it working at night."

"What! do you mean that you make this journey every day?"

"Yes," said the poor woman still, "and he has not yet seen my signal, or my wife he has not replied to it. But since our vengeance has come to help, I no longer despair."

"What do you want of him?" asked M. Jean, now without a trace of anxiety in his voice.

"I want you to obtain permission for me to have an interview with Robert in the prison."

"If the favour you ask depended merely on myself," said M. Jean, "it would have already been granted you, but I am almost certain it will be refused, at any rate while the investigation is in progress."

"Ah! that is judgment, no pity," murmured the peasant.

"You are wrong, my friend," replied the priest gently: "the magistrate who has charge of this case is, on the contrary, a most good-natured man; he comprehends your sad situation, and he is quite disposed to do what he can; so I am sure he will at last permit you leave to write to your husband."

"Not without my letters being read," said the poacher's wife, bitterly.

"And that is a sad condition, and you must understand that a man charged with a crime cannot be allowed to communicate freely with his friends. It is not desirable that the accused should be enabled to evade the law."

"I see that the judges wish to deprive Robert of every means of defending himself, and even of the consolation of seeing those who still take an interest in him."

"Misfortune makes you unjust, and I hope with all my heart that the magistrate will yield to the reasons I shall lay before him."

"You promise me, then, to ask this favour of him?"

"Yes, I promise it, because I think I can do more for it that you will not use my trust. On one side, you will promise I hope not to make any more foolish attempts——"

"If they allow me to speak to him, I will not remonstrate; but if they deny me this favour I shall take the train over and over again until he has seen me, until some sign, some gesture, some movement has shown me that he knows I am thinking of him."

"But it's quite senseless! you don't even know in which yard he takes exercise, or at what hour of the day."

"Oh! I know his cell is on the third gallery, so I know where the yard is."

I obtained my information from people who supply things to the prisoners awaiting trial. They told me that Robert took exercise in the morning, and since then I have not missed passing by in the train every day. If you knew with what anguish I await the moment, how my heart beats when the train approaches the prison, how oppressed it feels when I can no longer see the walls. Ah! I should cease to live if I ceased to hope. Listen! to-day I noticed among the houses which touch the viaduct a garret window which I fancied must overlook the yard. Ah! I would give my life for the right of remaining all day at that window."

"You forget that you are a mother," said M. Jean severely.

The poacher's wife trembled, cast down her eyes, and remained silent, big tears coursing down her face the while. This conversation took place on the shady walk edging the canal between the Place de la Bastille and the Seine. The curé of Charly, on leaving the station, had walked in that direction to avoid the crowd and secure a favourable site for quiet conversation. The singer was walking sadly and silently beside him, and they went a hundred steps further or so without exchanging a word. M. Jean thought, however, that it was his duty to recall this poor wanderer to the right path of duty.

"Madame," he said, "I haven't sufficient courage to reproach you with the excess of your devotion. I merely beg of you to think of your children, who have only you to look to in the world. If your manoeuvres outside the prison became known to the authorities you would probably be arrested. In any case you would seriously compromise your husband."

"For heaven's sake, sir, obtain permission for me to see him," she murmured in a choking voice.

"Listen to me," replied the priest steadily, "I am, at this very moment, on my way to the Palais de Justice, where I am summoned by the magistrate conducting the inquiry. I am quite willing to ask this favour of him, and I will call his attention to those mysterious features of the case, which seem to be in favour of your husband, and to indicate his innocence. You believe him to be innocent, do you not?"

"Do I believe him innocent? Ah, why can't I myself explain Robert's character to the magistrate, tell his life story, show what a strange fellow he is."

"Well, what you might tell the magistrate you can tell to me just as well, it is important that I should share your opinion in pleading your husband's cause. I know but very little of his life, or of your own, and if I inspire you with sufficient confidence——"

"In whom should I trust, if not in you?" said the singer warmly. "I will tell you everything, without changing or suppressing any particular; hard as it is for me to recall my sad past life. My name was Eugénie Giraud, and my father was a farmer, we lived in the Brie district, where he cultivated a farm of 1,500 acres. He was rich, and had no other children than myself, my mother had died in giving birth to me; he sent me to school at Meaux, with the daughters of wealthy townspeople and noblemen, and I received an excellent education."

"I guessed that before you told me so," murmured M. Jean.

"I was sixteen," continued Eugénie, "and was on the point of returning home, when a regiment of hussars came to garrison the town. Robert was a non-commissioned officer in it; he saw me walking out—he wrote to me—I knew nothing of life, and already—yes, I was already madly in love with him; I was imprudent enough to reply to his advances; a month afterwards, I ran away with him."

Unhappy child !”

Yes, most unhappy, for, from that sad day my life has been one long
 pain to me. Remember me to Paris, and let me know when I can
 send the gratuity of my death. His son could tell me that he was being
 held for as a deserter, and threatened with being court-martialed; where-
 fore I begged him to come with me and implore my father's pardon, and be
 entered."

"That was a move in the right direction."

"That was a move in the right direction. Yes, happy as it would have been, if for me had I then died in my father's arms, I should have been satisfied. My father adored me; he understood me. If I fell to any one man, who had seduced me, I should become a lost man. He went to see the Colonel of Robert's regiment, and so arranged that the two soldiers' families were married upon conditions that they could not be separated. Then, when my Robert was superseDED in the regiment, and a fortnight later we were married."

"And settled at your father's house?"

[illegible]

"I was no doubt speedily spent; unless I had been so, I was recovering from my first confinement, when I should have parted with me that we had nothing left us, and that he was prosecuted for debt."

Is any one doing anything to a living, breathing body of life?"

"I said that I was really," he said, "in love with some woman, with a girl I had known since childhood. The idea of stoning in the field had taken possession of my mind, but he still loved me. To the purpose, no one required these old bones were needed. The only one I could ask for was my father. I was worn out by fatigue, over-
with grief; still I left for the farm."

"And your father gave way?"

He was full of distress; he entreated me to consent to a legal separation, and to remain with him; he offered me a home with him for myself and child. I told him that Robert repented his errors, and was ready to atone for the past; my poor father allowed himself to be won by my entreaties."

The man whom you try to excuse was lying, then—lying when he prodded you to expiate his fault?"

No, he was sincere then, but he could not withstand temptations which led him ruin. Two years later my father died of grief, and the property left me, although greatly much enriched upon, might yet have sufficed support us comfortably. However, Robert had an inordinate love of luxury, our ruin was soon complete."

Do you still assert that he loved you?" sadly asked M. Jean; "do you intend to excuse him—he, who was not even deterred by the thought of children from following the fatal path?"

Yes, he loved me," said Eugene excitedly, "for he was jealous, and his jealousy brought about the dual catastrophe which separated us. God was that his suspicions were unjust ! But he was embittered by misfortune ; then there was a man who was his evil genius, a man who drew him into political plot, and who did not cease inciting him against me by odious

calumny. Robert received an anonymous letter, challenged the man who was denounced to him as a rival, and killed him."

"A murderer once before!" said M. Jean, in a low voice.

"Oh! he killed him in a duel, and the fight was perfectly fair; but on the very day he fought he was denounced as a conspirator by a traitor, and had barely time to abscond to England."

"And you have seen the innocence of a man who, in his anxiety for his own safety, had the cowardice to fly and abandon you?"

"As I told you before, I had been slandered to him, and in his eyes I was guilty. He left me with curses, and only the other evening, when fate caused me to involuntarily denounce him, I read in his eyes that he had never forgiven me."

"A sorry cause for such behaviour of heart, and one which I shall hardly care to urge in his favour. Will you also try to justify that lawless life he has led since his return to France?"

"No, and I realise very well that I have not yet earned need; but I swear to you before God, that although Robert raised me, although he unjustly hates me, and has lived for many years in a state of revolt against the law, I swear to you by my children's life that he is incapable of committing a murder."

The poor clerk's wife articulated this protest with such earnestness, that she made a great impression on M. Jean. "God would never permit a scoundrel to be so loved," he murmured.

"Listen, madama," he continued gently, "appearances are all against your husband. I can't conceal from you that it is so, and I greatly fear that his past life may wound his cure in the opinion of the authorities, instead of doing him any good, as you hope; still it shall never be said that I neglected a single chance to save him. As I previously told you, I am summoned before the investigating magistrate to-day, and I will profit by the opportunity to ask him not to hurry matters on. I may as well tell you also that something fresh may have cropped up, for a number of people who had not yet been heard, are summoned, like myself, for to-day, and it is to be noted further, that none of these people, as far as I know, witnessed or knew Mitchell's murder, or your husband's arrest: in fact, none of them even know him."

"Oh! heavens, can they have discovered the real criminal?"

"I hardly dare to hope it, but this change in the line of the inquiry is none the less of good augury; at least, so it seems to me. Besides, I shall ascertain the truth, and promise to let you know all about it the very day. As to the permission you so much desire, I will do all I can to obtain it; but don't you fear a bad reception from your husband? If he is still influenced by the remembrance of the slander against you, and if he hasn't forgiven you, what will you obtain by the interview?"

"Nothing! Nothing, except the happiness of seeing him."

"Of seeing him! Alas! you are doubtless not aware to what painful restrictions you must submit, if you are granted your request. I have had occasion to visit people in prison several times, people who had asked for my ministry, and I have to tell you, if you do not already know it, that you will not be alone with your husband for a single moment, that a barred grating will separate you from him."

"Never mind, I shall see him!"

"And supposing he repels you, and has the cruelty to reproach you with the involuntary wrong you did him by putting his pursuers on his track?"

"I will throw myself at his feet, and will pray to him on my banded knees; he is good, generous, he will remember that he once loved me, and he will

"I have no objection to your being his friend, that you take interest in him, that we are working, and that all that can be attempted on his behalf to save him, is being done."

You will protect him, also, his children, won't you?" asked M. Jean, with great emotion in his voice.

Yes, yes," said the mother, in reply, her head. "I will remind him that he
to love them as much as I do, but he hardly knows the meaning of them. For
misfortunes which have befallen him, and I shall be sure to tell him of the
and then he will be sure to think that it was he that brought on the
I will speak to him of the children, the one whom he saw grow up, and
prays each evening for his father."

"Poor little fellow!" murmured Mr. Jones. "When he was held close to his father, overboard, during the storm, on the evening of that fatal meeting, a sailor named Tom put a hand to him, but he died as Tom watched a few minutes."

"He did not see that I had been excluded from my place, and it quite natural that he should feel somewhat angry; he remarked that as my father thought me a good deal better than I am! Ah! I suppose so, for had I not spoken, had I not told you that a man had just left wood, no one would have thought of Robert——"

wood, no one would have thought of Robert—
 "You are wrong, and I am sure you are long-headed to me such
 self with. You are all very kind at heart, but the question is
 shall write a letter to him, and he could not have changed the a
 long."

us late have a small amount. She was evidently not inclined to listen even at this point, but our point would have been well timed in going to the bank. The bank was getting busy and the money rate did not be kept waiting.

[illegible]

M. Jean was a few years younger than his wife, and left her with a full heart, during the thirty years of his illness, and during the years of the illness he had never met with a case which interested him so deeply as this one. This was his mother, whose life had been but one long anguish, and who had yet known how to suffer with a calmness; this his mother's wife, who had nothing better than to devote herself to the execution, and was well deserving of the respect which the priest of the parish of St. Louis rendered her. In his heart, deeply he ever questioned whether he was morally above reproach, whether that would contain so much in its favour for so poor a criminal. The Lord answered. That was a sufficient reason, for him to exonerate. Then he reflected, and yet, as he walked about the quay on his way to the Tribunal de Justice, he did not help thinking that many pains were well deserving of the deserved stay had just passed. Adversity, the natural punishment, and the delusions of the man, he could variously dramatise and constitute circumstances, in which he herself might perhaps have been the victim. Was her husband's jealousy purely without just cause? was it admissible to think that his hatred had arisen without reason or proof? M. Jean was not sufficiently acquainted

with their past life to decide this point, and it went against him to inquire into it too closely. He preferred to reflect upon all the mystery enshrouding this criminal case, which bid fair to become a *cause célèbre*. He had at first refused to believe in Robert's guilt. The anonymous letter addressed to Jacqueline Ledoux seemed especially inexplicable to him, if it were assumed that the murder had been committed by this poacher. A crime occasioned by a fortuitous meeting cannot be pre-announced. However, the priest had been gradually convinced by the inquiry which the sergeant of gendarmes had carried on, and but little doubt of Robert's guilt then remained to him. Still, the summons sent to himself as to the landlady and customers of the Grand Vainqueur gave him food for reflection, and he was tempted to regard it as a favourable omen.

Thus when he reached the Palais de Justice he vaguely hoped that he would learn that something had changed the aspect of the case, and that the poacher's conviction was no longer a foregone conclusion. He had already been to see the magistrate once before, and had no need of anyone to guide him through the labyrinth of passages and yards of the vast pile, where all the judges of France, even those of the revolutionary tribunals, have sat for centuries past. He went straight to the magistrate's office situated at the end of a long passage on the third floor of a block of buildings facing the Sainte Chapelle.

The staircase and the passage were full of animation that morning; advocates hurried about wearing their gowns and carrying large portfolios full of briefs under their arms, hurried witnesses were trying to find their way hither and thither, while some Gardes de Paris led along a poor devil of a prisoner, who held a handkerchief over his mouth and had pulled his hat down over his eyes so as to hide his face from observation.

M. Jean was not in the humour to derive any pleasure from the sight of such a picture. He had just discovered that he had arrived a long while before the right time, and he contemplated, with some dismay, the prospect of promading about a place of the kind in his ecclesiastical dress. He indeed felt himself out of place in the midst of all these people who gazed at him with mistrustful surprise, and although he would willingly have entered a murderer's cell to speak with him of God, he felt as if he were almost compromising himself by lingering in the ante-room of the criminal investigation, a apartment where no one needed his message of consolation. However, an unexpected meeting relieved him from his embarrassment. On turning the corner of a passage in which he was wandering along somewhat sadly, he found himself face to face with M. Julien de la Chanterie.

The young advocate did not wear his gown; his elegant attire, as well as his shapely figure, and open expression of countenance, contrasted strangely with the negligent garb and scowling expression of most of the people here assembled by legal necessity. He immediately recognised M. Jean, and bowed to him with deferential cordiality. "I have to inform your reverence," he said, after exchanging a formal greeting, "that affairs have taken a fresh turn, which will please you if I am not mistaken, for I think you take an interest in this unfortunate poacher."

"Indeed!" exclaimed M. Jean, "has anything favourable to his cause been discovered?"

"Better than that, your reverence; proof of his innocence, perfect and unquestionable proof."

"Ah, sir, how you delight me! I am the more pleased to hear it as I feared it was impossible to save him. But who has effected this miracle in his favour?"

have partly contributed to the result," said Julien smiling, "for it is I who put the examining magistrate on the track of the real criminal." "The real criminal! What! you are acquainted with him then?" exclaimed M. Jean.

"I am acquainted with him."

"And he is arrested?"

"Not yet, but he will be very shortly—to-day I hope."

"He is within reach of the law, then? He cannot make his escape?"

"He would vainly try to do so, for he is closely watched; but he will be able to make no attempt, for he still hopes that matters won't go so far. As has been questioned very carefully, in a way not to excite his suspicions, every way of justification he has made certain assertions, which have yet to be proved. If, as I feel convinced will be the case, they are shown to be false, a warrant for his arrest will be issued at once, and executed this very evening." "Then this unhappy man in prison will be set at liberty at once. What a horror for his wife!"

"Excuse me, your reverence," said La Chanterie, with a smile, "things will go as fast as you think. There are formalities to be attended to, difficulties both numerous and complicated. It will be necessary also to determine whether the teacher, Robert, may not have been an accomplice, even to a slight degree, of the principal perpetrator of the crime, and even if it is in that he had nothing to do with the murder, he will still be liable to prosecution in connection with his teaching misbehaviour. In fact, a severe sentence may be passed on him on account of his antecedents, and as a caution to others for having misled justice, albeit involuntarily."

"But he has already been punished, it seems to me, and it would hardly be fair to make him pay the penalty of an error for which he himself has suffered." "I never allow myself to pass judgment on judges," said the young advocate coolly, "and you will agree with me, that Robert ought to be thankful at being let off so easily."

"Had it not been for your help, sir, it was all up with him; and his wife would have simply died of grief. I really don't know how to thank you enough, on her behalf and that of her poor children."

"They don't owe any gratitude to me, I assure you. Someone took up the cause, and ordered me to see them righted. I have had the good fortune to succeed, but I have only executed my orders."

"Which were difficult ones to execute; for all the circumstantial evidence against Robert, and I don't help wondering how you have succeeded in sustaining the truth."

"Chance has greatly helped me," said Julien, modestly; "and besides for an entire week I have done nothing else but attend to this affair. Moreover, the real criminal was within easy reach, and once on the track, I had no difficulty in following it up."

"The murderer is a resident of Charly, then?" said M. Jean sadly. "I am glad that in my dear parish no one would be found capable of—"

"Set your mind at rest, your reverence. The murderer does live at Charly, I doubt whether you consider him a parishioner, and when you are acquainted with his name——"

"Would it be an indiscretion to ask you what it is?"

"Certainly not; and the less so, as you will learn it very shortly in the magistrate's private room. For if I am not mistaken you have been summoned to give evidence on certain facts of the case, which this scamp brings forward to justify himself."

"I!" exclaimed M. Jean, amazed. "I summoned to bear witness in his favour! It's impossible. I don't know him; and even if I did know him, am not aware of anything calculated to exonerate him. To bear witness, you say. What about?"

"As to that, your reverence, it is impossible for me to tell you, for I don't know. The investigating magistrate who heard my statement yesterday gave me to understand that he had summoned several important witnesses for to-day, and you among the number. He also told that after questioning them he would come to a final decision in this matter, and he even desired me to tell my friends to be ready this afternoon, in case he required my services. That is what has brought me here, and I am delighted that I came early, since I have had the pleasure of meeting you. I hope that a day so well begun will end well," added Julian de la Chantrie, "and that the poor poacher's family will shower blessings on your head this evening."

"God grant it, sir! I am now quite anxious to see the magistrate."

"I don't fancy you will have to wait long, for we have to deal with a magistrate who prides himself upon his punctuality; and I should not be surprised if he arrived before the time."

"Then," rejoined M. Jean, "you think I shall learn the name of the scoundrel in whose stead an innocent man has almost been condemned? Excuse my reverting to the subject; it is not mere curiosity which impels me, but the interest I take in the poacher's family, which urges me to ask you——"

"The name of Michel's murderer? You remind me I ought to have told you already; and you will be greatly astonished when I inform you that this scamp is——"

It was no doubt ordained that M. de la Chantrie should not complete his revelation; for just as he was about to give the murderer's name, he stopped short, raised his hand to his hat and bowed most respectfully to a gentleman attired in black from head to foot, who had suddenly appeared in the passage. M. Jean also recognised the new comer, who was indeed the investigating magistrate, and who, after nodding in a friendly way to the young lawyer, approached the priest in a deferential manner. "I thank you, your reverence, for having thought of coming here betimes," he said courteously. "I shall be able to converse all the longer with you, and avail myself of your sagacity to decide a most difficult case."

The priest bowed; he had not expected this kind of reception, and he thought it singular well. "If you will kindly come into my private room," continued the magistrate, "we shall have time to talk matters over before the arrival of my clerk. As to you, my dear sir," he added, turning towards Julien, "I rely on your remaining near at hand; you know I shall want to see you after this business, which will perhaps take up some time; however, I will send for you directly it is over." Thereupon, the magistrate, opening the door of his room, ushered M. Jean inside. The apartment was like all those which serve for all the preliminary skirmishing between prisoners and judges. Naturally enough in this duel, justice has the choice of position and advantage of the light; that is to say the magistrate sits with his back to the light, which shines full in the prisoner's face. It follows, therefore, that in all these rooms the furniture is invariably arranged in the same fashion. A large writing-table with the orthodox armchair, seated with green morocco leather, for the magistrate; close by a less pretentious table and chair for the clerk, and opposite, another chair with a velvet seat for the prisoner or the witness who is being questioned. Further off, close to the wall, there is also a place for the condemned in a small nook, where he may nap while seated there.

On this occasion the magistrate, seeing official customs aside, courteously went forward on a bench for the priest's accommodation made him sit down beside him.

There was no longer a man insisting upon obtaining evidence, but an official in the robes of a venerable priest. "Your reverence," said he, "I have told you that I have no longer your charge at Châilly; consequently, it is only a matter of necessity for me to do so. The matter in hand is naturally the case of Robert Martin."

"I have told all I know about it," M. Jean hastily replied.

"I have not the slightest doubt of that, your reverence. Besides it is not just to say more of what I have had you summoned here, but rather to ask for certain information."

"Respecting the prisoner's family perhaps? Ah, sir, I take a warm interest in it, and if it were possible for you to grant the request I have to make I should feel very grateful. The prisoner's poor wife begs permission to go and see her husband in prison, and I believe that I can answer for her visiting no bad result."

"Just now, and until the investigation is finished, such a visit is out of the question, but it is quite possible that very shortly, perhaps to-morrow, that authorization you ask for won't be necessary."

"Then the Count de la Chanterie was not mistaken just now when he came to me to hope that——"

"That I should be obliged not to proceed against Robert Martin?"

"Yes, Monsieur de la Chanterie gave me to understand that the unfortunate fellow's innocence was fully established."

"Oh! we have not quite got to that. Still it is true that the investigation is taking a new turn; and if certain suspicions prove correct, the prisoner will be set at liberty."

"Monsieur de la Chanterie told me the guilty party was discovered."

"The guilty party, that's going rather too far; however, there are serious suspicions against a man who has certainly never had any connection with poacher, and whom you yourself know very well."

"I, sir?"

"Yes, you saw him quite recently; in fact, the person in question is that foreigner who lives at Châilly, in a villa called the Pavillon des Serbiers."

"What? you mean Monsieur Massmann?" exclaimed the priest, quite amazed.

"Why! yes," said the magistrate, "and I see you are quite as astonished at this accusation as I myself was, when Monsieur de la Chanterie brought it in your presence."

"Well, really, I should never have thought that a man moving in the highest ranks of society——"

"That is not a conclusive reason for his innocence; experience has taught us that a high position and wealth are not by any means guarantees of honesty, however, the foreigner under consideration has always enjoyed an excellent reputation at Châilly, at least, so I am assured, and I shall be much obliged if your reverence would give me your opinion on the subject."

"My opinion! I have none; and I have no possibility of having any, for I have barely seen this German more than once or twice."

"I beg your pardon; but a few hours before the murder was committed didn't you see him in a carriage which ran over a child on the Place de l'Église?"

"Quite so," said M. Jean. "The poor little fellow fell under the horses'

heads, and the worthy woman in charge of him lost her head. Happily they both got off with a mere fright."

"You forget to add, that this child owed his life to your brave devotion."

"Oh, sir! I did no more than my duty."

"A perilous duty, and I rejoice to acknowledge it; but did Monsieur Wassmann do his? What was his attitude after the accident?"

"He perhaps seemed rather more indifferent than one could have expected. I fancy that he did not at first understand the gravity of Marcel's fall. But he ended by being touched, and asked for Madame Ledoux's address."

"This Madame Ledoux is the cousin of the unlucky gamekeeper?"

"Yes, sir; she is the person who received such a strange anonymous warning that same morning. I ought to add that Monsieur Wassmann called on her that same evening to hunt for a better-housed man of money to indemnify the little boy for his accident and fright."

"I know that," replied the magistrate, rather sadly; "may I now ask you—not as a magistrate, but privately, and according to your sense of honour—may I ask you if, in all truth and conscientiously, you think M. Wassmann capable of committing the crime I am instructed to investigate?"

"No, certainly not; to speak the truth, I cannot myself understand what grounds there can be for accusing him. I don't see the least motive, for a deed of the kind on his part. He was probably ignorant of Michel's very existence. So why should he have murdered him?"

The investigating magistrate smiled, and replied with a shake of his head: "You sigh, your reverence, according to a judicial axiom which frequently proves true. *Is factus est prodest*—the perpetrator of the crime is he whom the crime has profited, so said the lawyers of the old days, and they were not wrong. But one must not forget that the great motive of criminal actions—interest—is often barely perceptible, especially at the commencement of an investigation. You can't fathom a man's soul at once, nor ascertain everything about his past life. To succeed you must have time, patience, sagacity, and even a little good luck. Like yourself I can't imagine what kind of advantage a German, but lately settled in France, could derive from the murder of Monsieur de Brancas's gamekeeper. Still there is nothing to show that we shan't find out later on, that some connection existed between them—a connection which led to dislike, hatred and vengeance."

M. Jean had listened with all due attention to the magistrate's remarks, but he was none the more convinced of M. Wassmann's guilt. "I am much struck, sir, by the justice of your observations," he said with a little hesitation in his manner: "but may I be allowed to ask, if the presumptions against this foreigner are founded on proof positive, on peremptory facts?"

"Well, your reverence, so that you may not have the slightest doubt on the matter, I will acquaint you with the exact position of affairs. You know that there is plenty of circumstantial evidence against Robert Martin the poacher? His presence in the *Éclaire* woods at the moment of the murder, the two shots fired from his gun, one after the other, the fact that the shot found in the wound was of the same description as that extracted from the body of the pheasant, the gun-wasp picked up near the dead body—there is enough in all that to secure his conviction ten times over, without considering his antecedents, which are extremely bad. One point remains difficult of interpretation, I allude to the anonymous letter. I have, therefore, given a deal of attention to it, and ordered searching inquiries to be made in view of discovering who wrote that compromising warning; but no enlightenment has

"In fact," said the worthy priest, who was amazed by such logic, "there is something mysterious——"

"And most suspicious," replied the magistrate; "that is why I did not hesitate to summon Monsieur Wassmann here."

"And did he come?"

"Yesterday, and I talked with him for more than an hour. I say talked, because in the present state of matters there was no question of a formal interrogatory. So far we only go on presumptions, which are certainly serious, though they do not warrant an order for his arrest. I therefore confined myself to summoning Monsieur Wassmann before me, more in view of examining him and studying him than of asking any explanation concerning his life and antecedents. I took good care not to mention Monsieur de la Chanterie's charges against him; still, I told him to his face that he had been denounced to me, and that he was accused of participating in the murder of the gamekeeper."

"How did he take that?"

"With a coolness I could not help admiring, but which was almost too forced. Instead of giving way to indignant protestations, he smiled, and, without resenting the audacity of those who had slandered him in this style, he immediately put forward an irrefutable plea."

"What was that?" said M. Jean, excitedly.

"He simply pleaded an alibi."

"An alibi? Then the accusation falls of itself to the ground."

"Yes, certainly; if it can be proved that Monsieur Wassmann was a long distance from the Bêlière woods at the hour when Michel was killed, there will no longer be any grounds for suspecting this foreigner. But allegations are useless; proof is needful. An alibi is a two-edged weapon which may strike the person who uses it. If it were proved to me, for instance, that Monsieur Wassmann has lied in trying to justify himself, I should no longer have the slightest doubt of his guilt, and I should not hesitate to issue a warrant for his arrest this very day. In that case Monsieur de la Chanterie will have been in the right when he spoke to you of the poacher's speedy discharge."

"Will Monsieur Wassmann's assertions be soon verified?"

"Before leaving my room I shall know what to think of the matter, and if the contingency I spoke of occurs, I shall sign the warrant forthwith."

"Then what about the witnesses coming from Charly——"

"They have been summoned by my order, and as soon as I have heard them my mind will be made up. However, I depart from the usual course, for I am not at all sure that their evidence will contradict M. Wassmann's statement; and, besides, this foreigner is, by reason of his social position, worthy of some little consideration. If the alibi is not disputed, it is useless that any trace should remain of the charge which my young friend, Monsieur de Brannes's nephew, has made, perhaps, rather too readily. I therefore intend to question the people from Charly-sous-Bois in a manner which will prevent them from thinking that the tenant of the Pavillon des Sorbiers is suspected; and I confide the secret object of the interrogatory to you alone. In this way I may have followed the wrong track in my investigations for a moment, but I shall not have caused any prejudice to a man whom I can hardly think guilty."

"I see," said M. Jean, sadly, "that the woman I take an interest in is not as near as I hoped she was to seeing her husband again."

"Who knows? Very frequently an intricate case like this one suddenly changes its aspect. We have to deal with two most singular characters: this

erman, who, despite appearances, does not seem to me quite blameless or impeachable; and this poacher, whose manners and language amaze me greatly."

"Is he worthy, in your opinion, of the passionate interest which his unhappy life takes in his fate?"

"I do not think that he is worthy of it, but I can perfectly understand his having inspired the interest you speak of. He is a man of remarkable intelligence, and appears to have received a thorough education, and he expresses himself readily and well. He is very precise in his replies and bold in his manner. I never listened to a more skillful defence than his; neither have ever met a prisoner who assumed frankness so ably. He hides nothing of his past conduct; he owns that at one time he led a dissolute life, and that he ruined his wife and father-in-law: still he passes lightly over the old family dissensions like a man of feeling, who does not care to make a display of his private wounds. On the other hand, he does not in the least conceal that he was at one time a convict, and he almost brags of the Bohemian existence which he has led for many years, pretending to justify it by certain paradoxical theories on the rights of property. And whilst he shows an ill-restrained tolerance, which is always breaking out in his behaviour, belying his assumed piety at every minute. Altogether, he appears to me to be a dangerous sort of fellow, who, had he been better guided, would have made a bold companion. This outlaw, this free-buster, certainly had in his composition good stuff for a soldier or a revolutionist, with enough intelligence and audacity to satisfy every ambition. The point is, has this wild bristman become a murderer? I don't care to say so as yet, though I am highly inclined to think that such is the case."

"Don't you think, sir, that if he fired upon Michel it must have been after a quarrel with the convict, and not a pre-meditated affair?" asked M. Jean, who knew already from the poacher's wife that her husband had once killed another man in a duel.

"He appears quite capable, to me, of giving way to one of those fits of anger which lead men to commit crimes, but the evidence so far obtained does not agree with such an hypothesis. Besides, if your reverence likes, you can judge of the man yourself; I see no reason why you should not visit him at Mazas."

"I should greatly like to do so, for you know, sir, that I am very much interested in the prisoner's family; his wife will be delighted to hear I have been able to take him some consolation and help."

"I will give you the necessary authorisation this very day. But time is passing and my clerk will be here directly. The witnesses must have already arrived. Before sending for them I want to ask you to confirm certain particulars of your previous statement."

"I am at your service, sir, and pray warn me when you wish me to retire."

"But I wish to ask you to remain here till I have finished, for I think it advisable that you should be present at the interrogatories, which ought to be controlled by your evidence, as you will understand when you have replied to the questions I am about to put to you."

M. Jean bowed and waited, somewhat surprised by this invitation.

"Now, your reverence," began the investigating magistrate, "you have declared it was nine o'clock when you were on the tow-path, with the prisoner's wife, and when you heard the shots fired in the Belère woods?"

Yes, quite so."

Well, in thus stating the time was this an approximate guess of yours, or

on the contrary, do you maintain the precise hour? When you were questioned on the evening of the crime and on the following day no great importance attached to this point, which has now, however, become a most serious matter. Try to remember a little, and tell me if you are perfectly certain in this respect."

"My recollections are most clear," replied M. Jean, without the least hesitation, "and I can't be mistaken, for this reason: when I heard the report of the gun I had just finished counting the strokes of our church clock. They were nine in number, and the last one was still vibrating when the shot was fired. I remember I said to myself that it was later than I had thought, and that my good old servant must have been long expecting me."

"Then the first shot was fired at nine o'clock exactly?"

"The first shot. The second one followed after an interval of two minutes at the most."

"Very good. Now, to your knowledge, there was nothing amiss with the clock that day?"

"No, sir. I may add that it never varies. I have remarked that ever since I came to Charly, and I have been the more struck by the clock's regularity, as that of my former parish went very badly indeed, for it was entrusted to the village locksmith, who regulated it every week."

"So there can be no doubt. The keeper was killed between nine o'clock and two minutes past."

"Just so."

"Now, your reverence, you know the part well enough to judge the various distances pretty well?"

"In the town itself—yes; but as for the neighbourhood, I would not be answerable for a mistake."

"This concerns the town itself. What time does it take, according to your calculation, to go from the Bellière woods to the first houses you come to in Charly on the near side to Paris?"

"There is some little distance, for Charly, as you know, has only a single street, which stretches away indefinitely."

"Do you think it would take, say, half an hour?"

"Not quite, but very nearly that. I reckon that by walking fast one could cover the distance in from twenty to twenty-five minutes."

"And if one ran?"

"In a quarter of an hour, at the least."

"And you would be obliged to pass the gate of the Château de Chasseneuil, and follow the Grande Rue of Charly all the way down?"

"Certainly; there is no other road."

"I thank your reverence. That's all I wanted to know. If requisite, I will beg you to repeat what you have just told me in my clerk's presence. But if I am not mistaken, here he is."

In fact, a door communicating with the passage was now heard to open, and a moment later a short man of discreet appearance entered the room and walked silently towards the little table appropriated to him.

"Are the witnesses I have summoned here?" asked the magistrate.

"Yes, Monsieur le Juge."

"Then, to begin with, call Mademoiselle Rose Jourdain."

The surname thus given was unfamiliar to M. Jean, but he knew that Mademoiselle Rose, of the Grand Vainqueur, was Jacqueline Ledoux's neighbour, and he remembered well how that very morning in his presence she had showed great distress of mind at the prospect of having to appear

ore the magistrate. However, he was at a loss to guess why she had been summoned, or how her entrance could affect the magistrate's decision in reference to M. Warran. The worthy old priest was still reflecting on the point when the door opened and entering the landlady, who appeared to be a very lively old woman, and who bowed wildly around her. In all probability, the prisoner, who the friends of the old maid had long worshipped as a saint in the hall where the executioner was anxious to torture them, did not look more terrified and astonished than Mademoiselle Rose did as the worthy skulkered her through the doorway. She had donned for the occasion her stately attire, and notably a certain straw hat adorned with various fruits and flowers, which gave her the appearance of a centerpiece at dessert; her brilliant eyes only lightened the pallor of her complexion and the rigid look on her face. Her hair, which she generally combed off her forehead to give herself a youthful appearance, her sandy yellow hair seemed to melt in with her salt tresses, for it fell in long forlorn curls over her thin face. In one word, she was no longer the queen of the Grand Vainqueur, whom Lizzyard, the chorist, was pleased to compare to a Montreuil peach in its maturity, when Verduron did not despise to ogle sentimentally, and whose pious chorists, the "males," willingly sang in lines of fourteen syllables, singing no more had sufficed to wither this last rose of summer. In one day she had aged five years.

M. Jean, who hardly ever saw her, and who took no interest in her charms, Jean, himself, was struck by her appearance; and he was still more surprised when he saw her roll her eyes wildly around and stagger as if about to fall. The magistrate, who was accustomed to frightened faces among the masses of the female sex, paid less attention to Mademoiselle Rose, and directed her to seek in, in which she rather fell than seated herself. After the preliminary questions as to her identity, questions which the old maid answered in an unsteady voice, especially when asked to state her age; the magistrate began the examination in due earnest. "You knew of the murder of Monsieur le Baron's daughter almost as soon as it had taken place?" he asked, looking Mademoiselle Rose full in the face.

"Yes—yes, sir," stammered the trembling spinster.

"How did you hear of it?"

"From my neighbour, Madame Ledoux, who heard the news in the street, and came rushing into the café, crying out. I was, in fact, very frightened."

"Did you go out that evening?"

"No, sir; I did not leave my establishment for a minute."

"Then you saw everyone who entered your house, from sunset till the time you shut up?"

"Yes, sir; very few people came in, however, for the news had upset the whole place, and——"

"You must remember the names of those persons, since they were so few in number."

"Certainly, sir. First of all, there was Madame Ledoux, who came twice—first of all just as night was coming on, and I was getting ready to light my lamps. She had just arrived from Paris, and only remained for a moment; at last, much later, she burst into the place like a bombshell."

"To give you the news of the murder. You told me that just now. Now, tell me who were the other visitors."

"Why—the gentlemen came as usual to make up a game of gentlemen of good position. Monsieur Villet, the mayor's assessor, Monsieur Cruchot, Monsieur Verduron, Monsieur Digonnard——"

Whilst Mademoiselle Rose thus enumerated the celebrities of Charly, the investigating magistrate looked at a list before him, and compared the names in it with those she gave.

"Are those the only ones?" he asked, looking up at the old maid.

"No, sir," said she, fidgetting on her chair; "I saw one other person—a person who does not usually visit the café—the German gentleman who lives at the Pavillon des Sorbiers."

"Monsieur Wassmann, you mean?"

"Yes, sir; I think that is his name."

"You are not acquainted with him, then?"

"Well—no, sir."

"Had you never seen him before that evening?"

"No; that's to say, I had seen him pass along the road in his carriage."

"Very good. But he had never called at your house before the day of the murder. What did he come for?"

"I don't know," muttered the old maid.

"What! You don't know. He must surely have told you why."

"Yes, yes; I remember now. Excuse me, sir, I am not accustomed to be questioned, and I lose my head. The gentleman came about the foundling child that Madame Ledoux brought back from Paris. He brought him some money on account of the accident."

"Caused by his carriage on the Place de la Bastille. I had the official report under my notice."

The magistrate paused, and appeared for a moment absorbed in the examination of some papers. M. Jean, who was greatly interested in the inquiry, did not take his eyes off Mademoiselle Rose, and could not understand her embarrassment.

"Now," continued the magistrate, "can you tell me what exact time it was when Monsieur Wassmann entered your café?"

"A few minutes to nine, sir," replied the landlady of the Grand Vainqueur without the least hesitation.

"You are quite sure of that?"

"Perfectly sure, sir. Madame Ledoux was not there when he arrived, so he waited almost a quarter of an hour for her, chatting with me and the little boy, and then he pulled out his watch and said he was obliged to leave, as it was just nine o'clock."

"Then your certainty is merely founded on the circumstance of his consulting his watch?"

"Excuse me, sir; I looked up at my clock, which showed the time to be five minutes past nine."

"And your clock goes well?"

"Very well, except that it is apt to gain a trifle; but it does not vary ten minutes in a week."

M. Jean now began to understand the drift of these questions, and became more attentive than ever.

"Were the residents of Charly whom you just named present at your conversation with Monsieur Wassmann?" asked the magistrate.

"Yes, sir; they arrived before him, and left after he did."

"Do you think they will remember the circumstance of his looking at his watch to see the time?"

"Well, sir, I couldn't say. Perhaps they paid no attention to it. I rather fancy, however——"

"We shall soon see," said the magistrate, and he leant towards his clerk

rose up, went out quietly and speedily came back, bringing M. Digomard with him.

Unlike Mademoiselle Rose, who had entered the magistrate's sanctuary looking all over, the chemist came in almost triumphantly. He had an indelible air, an air which expressed both his legitimate satisfaction at the thought of his momentary importance, and the cool dignity of a man determined to have out with the authorities. His ruddy face, usually good-natured in expression, wore an almost heroic look, which clearly signified: "I am a witness, whose evidence will be decisive, and whom no one will be able to influence."

As a matter of course, after at first believing, like all his fellow townsmen, in Robert's guilt, he had gradually begun to sympathise with this bold poacher, to make a stand in his own fashion. Digomard's good nature would not have him so far as to let the prisoner have a bit of sticking plaster on credit, but urged him to uphold him in the eyes of the law, and but little more was wanting to make him assert that the late keeper Michel, the vile servant of a hunt, had killed himself, so as to bring trouble upon poor folks. In point of fact there were two men in Digomard: first, the tradesman anxious to become rich, and above all desirous of never risking a copper; secondly, the free citizen, whose most sacred duty is to resist the government, and who thinks he has been selected to give it a lesson. A magistrate appointed and paid by government could only be an enemy to Digomard, who was an elector, eligible to be elected as a deputy and duly licensed as a chemist, this latter point being far less importance in his eyes than the two former ones.

And then there was a poacher in the case, that is to say, an independent fellow, who laughs at laws, infringes landlords' rights just sufficiently to acquire popularity, without disgracing himself in the eyes of a respectable tradesman accustomed to make two hundred per cent. profit on chemical produce. Digomard therefore appeared with the deliberate intention of bearing witness in favour of the prisoner; and the presence of the priest of Charly only served to encourage him in his determination to resist the suggestions of a magistrate whom he pronounced beforehand to be prejudiced.

Judging by the chemist's solemn demeanour, you would have said he was repairing to the court of the Inquisition, and indeed it was with all the dignity of Galileo appearing before the judges that he condescended to take a seat. Great was his dejection when he heard himself simply questioned as to whether on the evening of the crime he had seen M. Wassmann at the *café du Grand Vainqueur*, and at what time that foreigner had arrived there. The chemist was not a man to commit perjury, and he had an excellent memory; so he was obliged to answer, as Mademoiselle Rose had done, that M. Wassmann had come in at about ten minutes to nine, and had left soon after he had struck.

M. Jean then realised the situation and hung down his head in sorrow. The hope of saving poor L'Amie's husband faded away in presence of this evidence, which clearly established M. Wassmann's guilt. After Mademoiselle Rose's categorical reply the magistrate made up his mind, and he did not consider it necessary to question the customers of the *Grand Vainqueur* at any length. Each of the domino players came in turn and vouched for M. Wassmann's presence in the *café* at the time when Michel was being murdered in the *Sellère* woods. M. Villot, who was always afraid of compromising himself, answered rather guardedly. He stated that as his watch had stopped, he had not been able to consult it: but he ended by admitting that within a margin of ten minutes or so the reckoning of the other witnesses was correct.

When the magistrate inquired how long an interval had elapsed between M.

Wassmann's departure and the closing of the café, the domino players replied in a less peremptory fashion. They agreed in saying that Jacqueline Ledoux's noisy arrival and screams about the fatal event had upset their party and made them leave the Grand Vainqueur. They had each of them hurried off in search of fresh news, and had employed the remainder of the evening in going from house to house discussing the terrible business, which would fill all the Paris newspapers, and bring the little township of Charly-sous-Bois into notoriety. However, not one of them had troubled as to what time it might be by the church clock or that of the municipal offices when the catastrophe was discovered. As to Mademoiselle Rose, who had visibly recovered from her emotion, she declared without the least embarrassment that, terrified and thoroughly upset by Madame Ledoux's story, she had hurriedly got rid of her neighbours and March, so as to close her establishment as quickly as possible and retire to rest much earlier than usual.

This explanation was certainly a most natural one and the magistrate did not dwell upon it. He looked at M. Jean as if he wished the priest to say what he thought of this unanimous evidence, and he read on his saddened face the conviction that the poacher was guilty. The case now seemed ended, and he thought he might let Mademoiselle Rose and her customers retire.

The old maid rose to leave with evident satisfaction and the celebrities of Charly did not require pressing to take their departure. Digonnard alone felt a wish to distinguish himself, and prove to the magistrate that a man of his importance was not to be inconvenienced unnecessarily. "Sir," said he, in a pompous tone, "I have failed to understand the object of the examination which I and my honourable companions have just undergone; but as it concerns the millionaire Wassmann, it is my right and duty to tell you that I have no confidence in that wealthy foreigner."

"That is a personal statement which seems to me quite uncalled for," coldly replied the magistrate, amazed at the chemist's impudence.

"All the same, sir," retorted Digonnard bridding up, "it seems to me that in my position of a French citizen, enjoying civil and political rights, it is quite allowable for me to enlighten justice."

"But I don't see how your opinion can enlighten it."

"My opinion rests on certain facts."

"If that fact is not connected with the investigation I am engaged on there is no need for you to apprise me of it."

"This fact is of the greatest gravity, for it proves that this rich fellow of the Pavillon des Sorbiers leads a most suspicious and underhand life in Paris. This man who tries to crush the poor folks of Charly with his luxury, why I met him, I, who speak to you, in the neighbourhood of the Palais-Royal,—met him dressed as a simple servant."

The magistrate reflected for an instant, "Is that all you have to tell me, sir?"

"But I think it is quite enough, and I——"

"Very well, sir, I will make a note of your declaration, and will think it over;" said the magistrate in a tone that admitted of no dispute.

At the same time he made a sign to his clerk, to show the witnesses to the door of his room, and Digonnard, baffled, despite all his self assurance, decided to follow his friends, but not without silently cursing the arrogance of the alaried officers of the law.

"Well?" asked the magistrate of M. Jean, as soon as the door had closed on the bigwigs of Charly.

"Well!" sighed the worthy priest. "I am greatly afraid that Monsieur

Wassmann has been slandered. It is evident that he could not have been at the time both in the city, and in the Breton woods, and as he was at the time of the shooting, his innocence is clearly established. And, I can't help wondering, being some distance as to his manner of life; this disguise that the chronic just informed you of is a very peculiar thing."

"Yes, if it were criminal. But this villain's hand" seems to me to be a trustworthy man, and besides he may have made a mistake. And then, even if it were proved that Monsieur Wassmann does disguise himself as a servant, this circumstance would agree pretty well with the information furnished me by the Austrian embassy, but it would in no wise help us to clear up the mystery attached to this murder. I can no longer hide from you that, as matters stand, I shall cease prosecuting the case as regards this prisoner. Of course the police will still continue to watch his movements at Paris, and an effort will be made to obtain further information about him from our ambassadors at Vienna; but the present state of the investigation is at an end as far as he is concerned."

"And that unfortunate man, Robert, is lost," said M. Jean, sadly. "The hopes with which Monsieur de la Chanterie inspired me have vanished."

"You are feeling your revenge, then, I must see that young fellow. He has natural talent, especially on an emergency, which should be, as there is, might be, to him, his right to demand. 'Pardieu de Justice' and I must have a daily visit, and I shall not go wrong. I don't want to get any more to-day," a cold remark, but, feeling that his clerk, who had come to see his papers in order, "a young man," said to Monsieur de la Chanterie that I want him. I am certain he is somewhere out somewhere in the passage, he is so impatient to learn the result of my interview with the witness."

"And he will be terribly disappointed," murmured the end of Charly; "he looked so much on a good result for the poor woman he is interested in, like my myself."

"Now I think of it," said the magistrate, "can you tell what makes him sympathize so much with a man, when he did not murder the keeper, at least, as said Monsieur de Brumes's pheasants? Has the poacher's wife anything to do with it?"

"No, certainly not," said M. Jean, who could not help blushing a little at the idea. "She is quite incapable of inspiring anybody with a passion, still less of sharing one. And, indeed, Monsieur de la Chanterie hardly saw her on that fatal evening, when we met on the banks of the Marne."

"You are quite right, your reverence," said the magistrate smiling, "the sea is perfectly inadmissible. I gave way to an old professional hobby. You know the dictum. 'Look for the woman——'"

"But I am not so sure that it is inapplicable in the present case. Monsieur de la Chanterie's cousin, Mademoiselle de Brumes, takes a great interest in this unhappy family. I even believe, that out of pity for the poor mother and children, she is desirous of seeing Robert set at liberty; and it is quite possible that her wishes have been interpreted as orders by Monsieur Julien."

"Ah! Yes! There is a cousin in the case. How did that escape me? La Chanterie is working the case to please her, and I am greatly afraid that his zeal and his efforts will not be rewarded with success. But I think I hear him. I will try at any rate not to dishearten him too much."

The door softly opened, and the young advocate entered. He appeared irritated, and you could read a question in his face. The magistrate, who guessed its purport, had no wish to prolong the young fellow's suspense. "My dear friend," he said, as he held out his hand to Julien, "I am very sorry to tell you that we have been beaten by Monsieur Wassmann."

"What!" exclaimed Julien.

"Ah! such is the case. He told me the truth yesterday. The five witnesses, whom I have just questioned, did not vary in their evidence, and they maintain that Monsieur Wassmann entered the café shortly before nine, and left it a few minutes after the hour struck. His reverence, moreover, is certain that nine o'clock struck at the church clock at the moment when the shots were fired in the wood, which is more than a thousand yards from the café. The *alibi* is therefore fully established."

"Impossible. There is treachery somewhere," murmured Gabrielle's cousin.

"Be careful that you don't accuse all those good people of perjury."

"If they don't lie, they are mistaken."

"All five? Its unlikely; you must confess it, my dear La Chanterie. Besides the woman who keeps the café, has an exact recollection of the circumstances. She looked up at her clock at the very moment when Monsieur Wassmann drew out his watch before leaving."

"This woman is, no doubt, the one I saw in the passage, in that absurd get up; I was struck by her embarrassed manner, and her agitation; you would have taken her for an accused party, rather than a witness."

"You exaggerate. She appeared to me rather frightened, but nothing more. After all, my friend, I can only say that you mustn't deceive yourself as to the result which would follow any charge against Monsieur Wassmann. After what I have heard, I am bound to stop my inquiry, and I should fail in my duty, if I based a criminal prosecution on presumptions set at nought by a positive fact. I must, for the present at least, decline to proceed against Monsieur Wassmann."

"And if I were to bring you fresh proofs?" asked Julien, warmly.

"If you were to bring me fresh proofs," answered the magistrate, "I should weigh them carefully, and act according to my conscience. But frankly, and between ourselves, my dear friend, have you got any? Do you hope to discover any? Or rather, are you not rather giving way to a preconceived opinion, to the very natural wish to do a good action, by saving the husband of that poor woman, whose misfortunes interest somebody connected with you? It is a good deed to protect the innocent, but you know, as well as I do, how seldom it is that one finds an innocent man among prisoners. And, besides, nobody must be accused lightly."

"Heaven forbid, sir," exclaimed Julien; "I swear to you I should never have brought into this business a man who is almost unknown to me, were I not deeply convinced that it was this man who perpetrated the crime."

"I don't doubt it; but though I have a high opinion of your convictions, you know very well that to issue a warrant against Monsieur Wassmann, I need something more. You are an advocate, my dear La Chanterie, you are young, enthusiastic, perhaps a little in love; I am an investigating magistrate, bound, consequently, to act with circumspection and impartiality, and inclined, by reason of my age, to look at things calmly. In these criminal cases, I can only take facts and evidence into consideration, and they all point towards the poacher. How can you expect me to accuse another man on your simple declaration? You gave me to understand just now that you had gathered other evidence. Let me hear it, and if it be of consequence, I promise you to utilise it and follow it up energetically."

Julien de la Chanterie opened his mouth to reply, and raised his hand to take his pocket-book from his coat, but not a word came from his parted lips; and his hand suddenly stopped short. He was in a terrible state of perplexity. He had the torn letter about him, that precious fragment, which might, per

aps explain the keeper's murder, and which he had not yet mentioned to the magistrate. Now was the moment or never, to produce his "find" and to draw from his examination all the conclusions that could be adduced in Robert's favour; but the reason that had prevented his doing so in the first instance still existed. After making this singular discovery, Julien had felt that it was better for him to keep it to himself, than to inform the magistrate about it. His course was not, perhaps, quite regular, but it seemed to Julien to be the safer one, in the sense that he expected to arrive at a better result by personally conducting the investigation, with all possible secrecy and expedition, than by relying on the authorities, which might be rather negligently prosecuted. One friend's advice had especially inclined him to take this resolution. The handwriting of the fragment was exactly the same as that of the anonymous note sent to Julien by La Chanterie, and the latter had from the outset been placed in the magistrate's hands. Justice was thus provided with a document which furnished a ready basis for investigation; and M. de la Chanterie hardly impeded the action of the authorities by retaining this fragment which, internally speaking, was but the duplicate of the first missive since it was written by the same hand. Now the authorities had been inquiring into the crime of the anonymous letter for a whole week, and had not yet obtained any clue as to the writer. Doubtless enough they would not have done any better with the torn fragment, and so, to discover the author of all this correspondence, it was better that the two should be two separate inquiries which might be blamed or praised wherever one or the other seemed likely to yield a result. Such had been Julien's opinion, and such it still remained; nevertheless, at the magistrate's question, he was for a moment tempted to reply by producing his curious paper, but was still seized by contact with the shot in the murderer's gun. However, reflection prevented him from yielding to his impulse. It seemed to him that, as M. Wassmann had more or less perfectly established his *alibi*, the magistrate would still decline to proceed, even if he possessed both letters. So what was the use of giving him the fragment, which he, Julien, hoped to turn to such good account? So far he had certainly learnt no more than he knew on the first day; but that was not a reason why he should be dissuading it, for he had as yet not had the time or the opportunity to carry his investigations very far.

Accordingly the young advocate hung his head and remained silent. The magistrate concluded from this that he considered himself beaten, and he thought the moment a favourable one to point out on what a slight basis his charge against M. Wassmann rested. He was not sorry, moreover, to lecture him a little at the same time. "So you see, my dear La Chanterie," he said in a patronising manner, "you found your suppositions merely on the curious adventure you met with on the day after the crime in the Bélière woods."

"Isn't that enough?" asked Julien.

"No, certainly not; if you reflect calmly, you will agree with me that the facts on which you reckon are very far from conclusive."

"However, it seems to me"—

"What? Because you thought you heard a man rambling about near the spot where the gamekeeper was killed; because, after vainly pursuing this man through the wood, you found a blouse in a ditch and a pair of boots in the river, you conclude that Monsieur Wassmann, who happened to be near by, was merely pretending to paint, and that he had just performed a marvellous bit of juggling. Concess, my friend, that an accusation based on such insignificant circumstances could never be presented to any jury."

"That is quite true," said the young advocate hastily; "but I quite reckoned

that those circumstances would constitute a starting-point for a conscientious inquiry; and——"

"Take care," interrupted the magistrate smiling; "you are going to tax me with partiality or thoughtlessness."

"Heaven forbid, sir; and I am ready to confess that everything conspires against me in this case, but my conviction remains unshaken. If I were the magistrate I believe I should act exactly as you do. But to me, a simple lawyer, it is allowable——"

"To try and prove the poor child's innocence? Yes, certainly, my dear fellow; and I should be delighted to see you succeed, for such a success would win you a great legal reputation; and, by the way, if you were inclined to undertake his defence at the Assizes, that might be easily arranged, for the wretched fellow is not in a position to choose his own advocate."

"I am much obliged to you, sir; but it would not quite do for me to undertake the defence of a fellow charged with murdering a man connected with my uncle's household."

"Ah, just so! I did not think of that. Then you decline——"

"To conduct his defence before the jury—yes; but not to collect all the materials for his defence."

"I see no reason to prevent your doing that, provided I you act with all the prudence necessary in investigating and so delicate a matter. I hope also you will keep me informed as to the results of your counter-enquiry. Reassured I will immediately act upon it, if you prevail with the necessary proofs."

"I shall not fail to apply to you," replied Julien evenly. "May I ask you if you think that the investigation will last much longer?"

"I don't think so. Unless something unforeseen occurs I reckon that I shall have finished with the case by the end of July; but the hearing will probably be deferred until the Assizes, in the first fortnight of September."

"Thank you, sir," said Julien. "I see that I have two months left me to complete my investigation, and now I have to apologise for having made you lose so much valuable time."

"An examining magistrate never loses his time when he is trying to enlighten the course of justice." And the magistrate added, turning to M. Jean, and holding out a paper on which he had just written a few words:—"Here, your reverence, is the authorization you asked me for to visit the prisoner Robert Martin. Later, on perhaps, I shall be able to sign one for his wife."

M. Jean warmly expressed his gratitude, and he and Julien, who seemed but little pleased with the interview, then took leave of the good-natured magistrate. They went out together and walked down the long passage where they had previously met. Both had been grievously undeceived, and the curé of Chavry saw that M. de la Charrière looked so sad and preoccupied that he hardly dared speak to him. It was the young advocate who first broke the embarrassing silence.

"Your reverence," said he, in a voice full of emotion, "when you again see the poor woman you have taken under your protection, pray tell her to be patient and hopeful, for I have great hopes that some day, and perhaps very soon, I shall be able to prove her husband's innocence."

"What!" exclaimed M. Jean. "You still believe in an acquittal, after the evidence that has just been given, and that of the brutality of the café in particular?"

"That woman lies, your reverence; and with God's help I will unmask her imposture," said Julien resolutely.

They had reached the entrance of the Palais de Justice, and they there parted. When M. Juchacz had taken his way to the rue de Clugny, Gilbert turned and stood for some moments looking back in silence, on his way to his own room in the rue de la Harpe. "What a good job I did not give up that terrible sword! It is my only remaining weapon in the duel I am about to fight with Monsieur Wassermann!"

VI.

NOTHING more passed away without any change occurring in the position of the various characters of this story, though much had happened as regarded them. Still, Gilbert was not in politics, his career still continued to take its ordinary course in the law. M. Wassermann, more brilliant than ever, still dazzled the public eye, and was very well liked and esteemed; but, on the other hand, a thunder-bolt had fallen upon the empire.

When the Duke de Gramont, then Minister for Foreign Affairs, had read to the Corps Legislatif the famous declaration which was about to cost France so dear. He could not have imagined any quietude, the nation which had fallen asleep in peace awoke to war. A few sentences had sufficed to make the Paris citizens feel the old warlike blood of the Gauls boiling in their veins.

On leaving the theatre, where "Cæsarism" was decided, these people, who had a quarter of eight for dinner, suddenly remembered that their fathers had been soldiers, and dreamt of victories and conquests, just as other fathers had been lawyers, and dreamt of premiums and dividends. However, they still respected it and even admired it; they still frequented Molière, but they ordered maps of Germany, and pin-boarded with colored pins, with which they marked out in advance the different routes to Berlin. A warlike breeze had suddenly sprung up, and spread its wings, turning every one's head from the Channel to the Pyrenees; and from the ocean to the Rhine triumphant songs already took the air: which poets were already occupied in republishing old hymns to *glory and heroism*; while the cannon of the Invalides, which since the capture of Sedan had not threatened their triumphant salute, were only daily hurled, daily a few volunteers argued against the general enthusiasm, and Julien de la Chauxerie among the number. Not that he was pretentious enough to assert that "we were unprepared," as a well-known orator now announced in the tribune, just as he had previously declared "that France was formidable." In fact, Julien did not meddle with politics, and had never thought of exceeding the number of cannon in the arsenals, or the number of soldiers in the regiments. Love's windily bore such matters to the petty statesmen who undertook to save emperors so as to win titles to give them later on. Still less did M. de Bismarck prove to belong to the set of dandies among whom it was the fashion to derive political ideas; and who, while supping at the Café Anglais, sneered at the young republicans so eager to be smothered for a hundred and fifty francs a month. Neither did he believe in the influence of nations, nor did he give way to blustering declarations of hostilities, such as are generally inspired by the masters' fear for their own skins. He was, in fact, quite willing to fight, and defend his country like his ancestors had done before him, like the brave sons of the soil, workmen and

July 6, 1870.—When the news of the Prince of Hohenzollern taking the Spanish throne was brought under discussion.—*Trans.*

mechanics, who are always willing to face death, whilst ambitious men talk, idlers amuse themselves, and Utopists lament. But Julien truly loved France, and he could not see her rush into such a perilous enterprise without feeling sad and sick at heart.

It chanced, Frenchman as he was, that he was well acquainted with geography, and did not agree in the belief that beyond the frontier there merely existed some nations quite unworthy of consideration. By a still greater chance he was master of two or three foreign languages, and was, consequently, able to read the newspapers from the other side of the Channel and beyond the Rhine. He had learned from them a great deal which the French press ignored; for instance, that Prussia had become a military power of the first rank, and that Europe, tired of French boasts and turbulence, still feared the Empire, but asked for nothing better than to be freed of all cause for doing so. The young advocate was thus much better posted on these matters than the rulers of the country or the opposition of the time; and thus the future inspired him with grievous apprehensions. Moreover, he was growing very anxious as the outcome of the task which Mademoiselle de Brannes had imposed upon him, a task which was becoming more and more arduous, and which he almost despaired of accomplishing satisfactorily. The *alibi* pleaded by M. Wassmann, and thoroughly proved by the evidence of Mademoiselle Rose and her customers; this indisputable *alibi* had completely changed the magistrate's views. The inquiry was now only prosecuted against the poacher, and if it did not progress very fast, it was, at least, certain that it would not be again diverted into another channel. The case might progress slowly, but, nevertheless, surely, until the Assizes came on. Julien had but himself to depend upon in his attempt to save the poacher, baffle the cunning of the real criminal, and send him to Mazas in place of the present prisoner. This represented a deal of work, certainly, but Julien was sustained by his ardent desire to please an adorable young girl, and with that desire, and a settled conviction of the justice of his cause, he would, indeed, have moved mountains.

He now began by obtaining information in all directions respecting the personage of very doubtful character whom he had such good reasons to suspect. At Charly he learnt no more than he already knew, and he failed to meet the tenant of the Pavillon des Sorbiers on any one occasion. M. Wassmann had either feared that the Count de Brannes would not give him a cordial reception, or else, for some other reason, he had changed his mind, and had failed to call at the chateau, as he had announced his intention of doing both to Henri and Julien. The poacher's supporter, on his side, took good care not to accept the invitation tendered to him and his cousin, on the banks of the Marne, to go and drink some kimmel and smoke a cigar with a man whom he accused of murder. He was obliged, therefore, to content himself with such chance information as he could pick up; and it was difficult for him to obtain any, for he had never gone among the people of the place, who, consequently, considered him a haughty fellow and mistrusted him. Thus, he could only confer upon the matter with M. Jean, Jacqueline Ledoux, and his uncle's servants, who were not particularly well posted. Jacqueline, indeed, warmly took M. Wassmann's part, for she considered him to be the most generous of men, since he had made Marcel a present of twenty-five louis. Moreover, she did not hesitate to answer for Mademoiselle Rose, whom Julien had at first suspected of perjury. She said so much in praise of the old maid, and the priest supported her so well in her statements, that Julien finished by half believing in the *alibi* himself, without, however, holding M. Wassmann to be altogether innocent. The idea occurred to him that the foreigner, instead of committing the murder in

erson, had perhaps had Michel put out of the way by a hired cut-throat, one of his own people for instance. The Count de Brannes's servants only knew the German's retires by sight, and could say nothing about them. Besides, they were unanimous in believing in the preacher's guilt, and Julien saw that no one at the château agreed with his views.

There was another side of the question the young advocate wished to clear up. He confessed to himself that the murder of a keeper by this wealthy foreigner was hard to understand, and, that to prove it, it was first necessary to discover what motive could have existed for the crime. Such a motive might come to light by tracing out the victim's antecedents, those of the presumed murderer being troubled in mystery, and quite unknown to the good folks of Charly. Julien made careful inquiry, and learned that Michel's family name was Amstein, and that he had been born at Seltzstedt, in Alsace, where he still had some relations, and where he had gone two years previously to take possession of a small sum left him by will. On leaving the army he had married a relation of Jacqueline's, who had died six months later, and after finishing two terms of service with the second regiment of Zouaves, he had entered the employ of M. de Brannes, with whom he had remained ever since. This information did not solve the problem. Still Julien was struck by one point, in which every body agreed. Michel, whilst alive, had on every possible occasion, showed a marked dislike for the tenor of the *Pavillon des Soldats*. It is true that he had never given any reason for this dislike, and that, like a true French Alsatian, he cordially detested the Germans. However, the old soldier was not a gossip by nature, and it was quite possible that he had borne M. Wassmann some grudge, the cause of which he had not thought proper to confide to his comrades. After commencing his investigations at Charly, M. de la Chauterie prosecuted them further at Paris, and with greater success. M. Wassmann was well known in a certain circle of society, where no questions were asked as to his antecedents, provided he spent plenty of money. Paris is hospitable to no one, so he probably thought it is only necessary to be a Brazilian or an Argentine, to obtain unlimited credit and make any amount of dupe. Thus it was only natural that a German gentleman, living in fine style and paying his tradesmen with exemplary regularity, should enjoy all possible consideration. In the neighbourhood of the Rue de Presbourg, where he was splendidly quartered, M. Wassmann was only spoken of with the warmest admiration. Julien soon understood the whole matter, and could find a reason for his being of becoming a member of the club, to which the foreigner had lately been admitted. Captain Henri de Brannes, who belonged to it, at once undertook to be his confidential sponsor, and this was the state of matters when a most peculiar adventure befell our amateur detective. Julien resided in the right wing of a large mansion in the Rue de Verneuil; the family to whom the house belonged, lived the thirds of the year on their country estate, and were not sorry to make something out of their town property, which was far too large for the solitary residence of an old dowerer and two children. The young lawyer's rooms were thus within easy distance of the Palais de Justice, and quite close to the town residence of his uncle and cousin, on the Quai d'Orsay. Julien's abode was indeed just suited to a man whose position requires that he should work and also go into society; and as for a gay life the young advocate had pretty well abandoned all early since Mademoiselle de Brannes had left the convent: still if needs be he only had to cross the Seine and Tuileries garden to reach the brilliant neighbourhood of the Madeleine and the Champs-Élysées. Besides, this old, narrow Rue de Verneuil, although it does not seem of much account at the first glance, has here and

There a certain aristocratic look, which is missing in the neighbouring, bustling Rue du Bac. You still meet with old arched gateways, pilared balconied frontages, with high garden walls covered with moss closely. There is indeed an odour of eighteenth-century antiquity about the street, and no wealthy *parvenu* would think of settling down there to enjoy the fortune he had gained by speculating on the Stock Exchange.

Julien, who was neither an up-start nor a millionaire, found himself most comfortable in his apartments, which communicated with a large garden, of which he had free use, from the end of spring till the end of autumn. The rooms were partly on the ground floor and partly on the floor above, and faced a courtyard on the one side, the garden on the other; two of the windows overlooking the Rue de Vercueil. M. de la Chanterie here led the life of a young man who is rich enough to enjoy every comfort, and yet not sufficiently wealthy to maintain a large household. The days are over when the heroes of Paul de Kock's novels kept their pleasures on an income of four hundred a year. Julien, who had three times as much, put up well enough with cabs, and contented himself with keeping one man-servant. He breakfasted at home, dined at a restaurant, and spent his evenings no matter where, when M. de Brannes and his daughter were not in Paris.

Since the death of the unfortunate keeper, his life had been somewhat irregular, on account of his having to keep himself informed as to the progress of the criminal inquiry, and of having to make frequent journeys to Charly. Not a day passed but what he hurried in the morning to the Palais de Justice, and then in the evening took the train to see his uncle. His visits to the magistrate in no way incommoded him; for this worthy official always received him good-naturedly, and had no objection to telling him what exact point the case had reached, nor did he remonstrate with him about his persevering faith in the gamekeeper's innocence. At Charly, however, Julien's position was more ambiguous, as M. de Brannes insisted on his proving the gamekeeper's guilt, and Mademoiselle de Brannes strenuously maintained that the fellow ought to be set at liberty. He thus had to exercise the greatest diplomacy and skill in rendering an account of his proceedings, so as not to disconcert either the father or the daughter. Gabrielle certainly had some pity on him, and did not bother him too much, while he gave his explanations to the count; but she knew wonderfully well how to draw him into a corner of the drawing-room, under pretext of showing him some old musical scores, and there call upon him to declare the truth, and make him swear, with one hand on Beethoven's pastoral symphony, that he would never abandon the man she protected. It happened pretty often that these bits of musical bye-play, and the games of backgammon he played with his uncle, made him miss the last train, and he was then obliged to sleep at the château, where, moreover, a bedroom was always reserved for his special use. On these occasions he left early the next morning, so as to have time to call at his own house before paying his daily visit to the Palais de Justice.

One day when he had been thus delayed, on returning home at about nine o'clock, he was surprised to find his valet waiting for him with a look of dismay on his face. This servant, who had only been with him for a year or so, was a first-rate retainer, and prided himself on his stolid countenance, which was usually as expressionless as the lovely heads which stare at one in hairdressers' windows. To account for his troubled looks on this occasion, some catastrophe must have happened in the house; and in fact M. Laurent, on being closely questioned by his master, confessed that he had passed the night away from home to nurse his brother-in-law, who was ill, and that he had just come back

discovered that some one had effected a forced entrance into the rooms at the night. He had determined not to do anything, so as not to compromise himself, and he had been on the point of warning the commissary only when M. de la Chantale arrived. Julien did not see in the least the least in the least of the man's illness, for he was pretty well up to the eyes of servants, and the great chief still did not think it to M. Laurent must need to ascertain how far he had been deceived by his nocturnal visitors. They had effected their entry by a ground-floor window, the iron blinds of which had been sawn through and the glass cut out, with a blow which would have done credit to a determined convict. This window opened into a smoking-room, which M. de la Chantale seldom used in winter, and you passed from this apartment into the drawing and dining-rooms. The two main dining-rooms and study were all on the first floor, and Julien first visited the latter rooms, and discovered, with indignant satisfaction, that six or seven fine pieces of plate, in full view on the long-table sideboard, had not been misplaced. The sideboard cupboard's drawers were open, and that the silver forks and several other odds and ends had been taken away. A suspicion at once occurred on Julien's mind, and he proceeded to the study, which he found by this means, gave him a full view of several national newspapers. In the bottom of this study he found a small box, and a small, less disreputable, bag, which had been used for the purpose, in which he had locked up his family papers, his correspondence, and ready money. About a hundred louis, which he felt sure the evening before had evidently passed into the pockets of those thieves, and a quantity of other valuables; but the rogues had no doubt put the papers and documents as well, for a leather case stuffed full of papers had been ripped open and emptied on the floor.

Julien, surprised by such a robbery, for the robbery had been written by another man, who had been easily picked up by his servants, and discovered that all the thieves had been carefully examined, each of them having been withdrawn from his envelope. It was evident that the robbers had been very particular to what they passed over, or they would not have spent their time in such a way. In the study matters were still worse. The pigeon-holes and drawers had been removed, and the thieves had not even taken the trouble to close them. The volumes in the bookcase also appeared to have undergone a close scrutiny, for they no longer occupied their usual places on shelves: some had been replaced upside-down, while others lay scattered on the floor. Such was the scene that one might have thought that Julien's private room had been sacked. However, some valuable weapons which decorated the panels of the wall did not appear to have excited the greed of these strange thieves. They had not been touched, and the same was the case with a beautiful old clock, and several other articles of value. The search had indeed succeeded in finding these rooms were certainly not commissaires' in position, but on the other hand they displayed a curious liking for old papers. M. de la Chantale was so struck by this curious preference, that instead of going to bring the men to justice, by calling in the police, he preferred to leave quite alone to think leisurely over the matter. He began by scolding his valet most severely, and forbade his reporting the matter to the police, or telling any one whatever about it. However anxious this cause may have been, Laurent received the master's orders with perfect composure, and promised to execute them faithfully, when upon Julien dismissed him, telling him to have the broken window repaired and the venetian blinds replaced by shutters coated with sheet-iron. The young advocate then shut himself up, and

began to examine everything more closely, and to reflect upon the cause of this peculiar piece of burglary. Ought he to attribute the affair to some common malefactor, or ought he rather to believe that the intruders had been prompted by some other motive than greed? "Suppose it were that wretched Wassmann who effected an entry here, so as to try and get hold of the letter I picked up in the Belière woods!" thought Julien. "First of all, though, does he know I have that letter?"

He tried to remember, and quickly realised that his idea was quite plausible. If the man he had met and pursued in the Belière woods were really the rich foreigner of the Pavillon des Sorbiers, Wassmann must from his hiding-place have seen him pick up, unfold, and read the paper forming the gun wad. Julien even remembered that a little while afterwards, on the banks of the Marne, in the heat of his altercation with the pretended landscape painter, the latter had not drawn a revolver from his pocket, or assumed a warlike attitude, until he, La Chanterie, had happened to bear of his discovery. Consequently the German was perfectly well aware that the letter was in an enemy's hands; and as he had taken the trouble to disguise himself and hunt in the bushes for the wad, he must naturally attach great importance to its possession. Moreover, although the magistrate, in questioning Wassmann, had not named his denunciator, the German could not have made a mistake as to the latter's identity.

All this was quite admissible, so that it was natural to believe that the burglary had been committed with the sole object of abstracting this compromising document. The murderer had no doubt fancied that M. de la Chanterie had hidden the letter in some secret drawer or corner, and that by scouring the room from top to bottom, one would surely end by discovering it. "Luckily I carry it in my pocket-book, about my person," murmured Julien, delighted at his own prudence.

There was, however, one weak point in his ingenious deductions, and this was the theft of the hundred louis locked up in the bull table. The nocturnal operator had not touched the plate or the jewels, but he had appropriated the gold without the least scruple. Such conduct on the part of a millionaire, however great a rascal he might be, seemed really out of place, and the young lawyer, who realised its improbability, was again assailed by doubts. After racking his brain, trying to arrive at some explanation of the matter, he ended by remembering that in a case in which a will had been stolen, and which had been tried at the Paris Assizes, the culprit, a man in good circumstances, had appropriated a small sum of money at the same time as his uncle's will, and that with the sole view of diverting suspicion from himself. Now Wassmann was quite capable of playing the same trick. Or still more likely, he might have employed a confederate, and have given him M. de la Chanterie's cash as his share of the spoils.

Julien's final conclusion was, that the burglary had been committed by Michel's murderer, and that it was the first engagement in the warfare which had been tacitly declared, on the day of the chase through Belière woods. How would this warfare be carried on? Would the German resort to violence against his adversary? In any case it was best for Julien to go armed in future, so as to be ready for all emergencies; and to avoid returning home on foot at a late hour. It suddenly occurred to him that his valet had perhaps been bribed by Wassmann, and that he had purposely absented himself during the night of the theft. This idea was worth inquiring into, for it would have been a terrible piece of imprudence to retain one of the enemy's accomplices as a servant, and La Chanterie in the first moment of distrust

but dismissed his smart servant Laurent. However, after reflecting coolly on the matter, he came to the conclusion, that if Laurent had been in connivance with the German, he would have managed matters more cleverly. For instance, he would have cleared away all traces of disorder among the portfolios, card-board boxes, books, and papers, so that his master might have believed that the theft had been committed under ordinary circumstances. So it was much more likely he had spent the night at some party, than as servants often get up among themselves, unless, indeed, he had been sitting about at some public ball in M. de la Chanterie's clothes.

Wassmann, who had probably set a watch on the mansion in the Rue de Neuville, might easily have ascertained that there was no one in the rooms that night, and that it was consequently a good opportunity to break into them. Moreover, that it was more prudent for Julien to keep his servant, than to dismiss him, for, once out of his service, the fellow would not have dared to talk about the matter; whilst by detaining him Julien could watch his conduct closely. He decided to do so, and having thus determined on his course of proceeding, indoors as well as out, he felt calmer, ready to face every implication and danger that might arise, and full of confidence in the final result of the struggle he had begun with M. Wassmann.

He was particularly anxious to measure his strength with his enemy at the club, to which he had requested his cousin to introduce him, and, as it happened, the news of his admission reached him on the morning after the burglary. Henri de Brannes wrote that he had been unanimously elected, and that he would meet him at the club at midnight, to introduce him to some friends who would exert themselves to procure his admission. The captain added that he relied on Julien's punctuality, the more so as he wished to speak to him on a personal matter.

La Chanterie was all the more disposed to keep the appointment, as a precaution warned him that his adversary would be at the club that night, and that chance might provide him with an occasion to study him. The hour mentioned by Henri was well chosen, moreover, being that when the nocturnal life of clubmen commences; after meeting at their clubs before dinner they most invariably remain there on coming out of the theatre, or leaving the party they have been attending. As a rule, in the month of July, there are not so many members present; but in that year, 1870, owing to the prevalent rumours of war, one might expect that all the clubmen who had not previously left for Baden or Trouville, would put in an appearance late in the evening for exchange remarks on the great question of the day. It was possible also that M. Wassmann, who called himself an officer in the Austrian service, would profit of the opportunity to give public expression to the antipathy which he must surely feel for the victors of Sadowa. Julien, was, therefore, delighted at the chance of meeting him and studying him closely.

He also felt considerable satisfaction at having been elected a member; not that he had feared that his respectability might be disparaged, but he knew wonderfully well what club feelings were, and that the most irreproachable candidate was liable to be black-balled. In Paris, in the privileged circle of the large clubs, it suffices for someone to take a dislike to your face, or the colour of your hair, for him and his clique to pelt you with black-balls. Some members take an unspeakable delight in vexing a candidate, and preventing him from getting his foot on the ladder they have climbed themselves. This is a delight peculiar to Frenchmen, and it is all the greater, if the victim be richer and of a higher station than oneself.

It is true that the friends of the unfortunate victim retaliate later on by

black-balling the candidates whom their enemies sponsor. From which it follows that at last no one can get elected, and evils have been known almost to fail through the constant refusal to admit new members. The candidates who have the best chances are those who are neither too rich, too handsome, nor too clever, or better still, those who are entirely unknown. It is to this last circumstance, and sometimes to the other three, that foreigners are almost always indebted for their admission. Thus Julien, who was well off, good-looking and witty, ought to have esteemed himself very lucky at not having met with any more opposition than had fallen to the lot of that enigmatical personage, M. Wassmann, who had come upon Paris society like an *aérolite*. The young fellow at once wrote to his cousin to thank him, and tell him that he would be at the club at midnight. After which he sorted his tumbled papers, and put them away again.

Having ascertained that none of his deeds or letters had been stolen he breakfasted heartily, dressed, and went as usual to the Palais de Justice, where he found every one talking about politics, and spreading all sorts of insane reports. The investigation had been adjourned, and the magistrate was not in chambers. Thus the poacher's bold defender learnt nothing new about the case, so that he spent the rest of the day in combining various strategical movements designed to secure M. Wassmann's detection. For a minute he thought of going to Charly, but he reflected that his uncle would very likely detain him for a game at backgammon, so that he might miss his appointment at the club. He decided, therefore, to remain in Paris, returned home to dress, dined in his own neighbourhood, and at a little before ten walked slowly towards the Boulevards. He meant to stroll about there quietly till it was almost midnight, and had no anticipation of the strange adventures in store for him.

Paris constantly changes in manners and appearance. She is gay or sad, she laughs or growls, bestirs herself or falls to sleep, according to the hour, the season, the winds that are blowing, and the ideas that are sprouting in men's minds. There are days when the city almost looks like a provincial town, when the hot sun of some August Sunday has driven the crowd towards the suburban stations, and when passers-by appear only here and there on deserted spots looking like human waifs and strays at sea on an ocean of asphalt. On other occasions, Paris is more like London, when a fine November rain splashes against the umbrellas held aslant like shields, and when long streams of bustling, muddy people dart over the sloppy pavements. There are other days when every one looks sprightly, with chin in air, and minds full of springtide thoughts, when women sport white parasols, and make the high heels of their new boots ring on the dry pavement.

Moreover, there are other days, gloomy ones, when mad ideas and tempestuous passions fill the heads of the citizens, who suddenly tear up the paving stones and raise barricades, to the sound of some idiotic refrain. The Boulevards are the heart of Paris, as Paris is the heart of France, and no one can ever forget the strange appearance which they presented on the evening of the 12th July of that fatal year of bloodshed, 1870. Julien de la Charterie, who had been diverted from his usual habits by the murder at Charly, had not seen the Boulevards for several days, and he had not the least idea of what now occurred there between eight o'clock and midnight regularly every evening. Thus, he was a good deal surprised, and greatly disgusted, when, on turning out of the Rue Vivienne, he found himself caught in the formidable crowd, which rolled incessantly from the Rue Montmartre to the New Opera House. The extraordinary uproar was something quite unknown to him. It

is not a riot, for the police officials did not interfere; it was not a festival, for there were no illuminations; perhaps, it was something of both—half revolution, half holiday-making. A compact, surging crowd covered the foot-ways, crowding on either side, so that vehicles could hardly get along. Sometimes the throng rolled like the waves of the sea; at others it darted along in an open, spontaneous way, as it were, to make way for bands of dreadful-looking ruffians, who rushed about singing "*To Berlin*," to the tune of "*Les Marseillais*." Then this crowd, composed of half-idle, lurching, idle, inquisitive, and heedful citizens, took up the refrain, "*To Berlin*," and cheered the scoundrels loudly. Women stood on top of the shouting "Long live War!" while street boys slid between the legs of the citizens, shouting "Down with Prussia!" Now and then a dissenting voice was heard here and there, timidly answering "Long live Peace!" But this sentiment was almost always received with loud scorn. The immense majority of this wild and populace demanded that the soldiers should start for the Rhine like the soldiers of Francoisey, though they themselves had not the least wish to cross the frontier. It was thus that they fought on that bellicose carnival, for which France would still blush, had she not cruelly expelled it, and especially had she not gloriously paid for it with the blood of her brave children. The Boulevard, inundated by the swarming, rolling mob, rolled like the sand of some vast lunatic asylum, and, as if to grace the scene with its own ghastly emblem, a total eclipse gradually darkened the disk of the moon—the true star of the dead. Looming never loses its own inclination, and so some people neglected politics to watch the eclipse.

Julien, sick at heart, was on the point of turning back, when he yielded to a feeling of curiosity, which urged him to ascertain for himself, how far the policy of the street battles and the impudence of the Government would go. He also remembered that the club, where he had an appointment, was close to the Champ Elysées, and that to reach it the shortest way was to proceed towards the Madeleine. Having determined to brave the noise and disturbance of the young fellow prepared to enter the thick of the crowd. He was sufficiently tall and young, to disregard the crush, and he had no reason for hurrying. So he crossed the roadway, and gained the opposite footway, which is always the more crowded of the two, even on ordinary occasions, and which on this particular evening was covered with a swarming mob.

It was not without some difficulty that Julien succeeded in gaining a foothold on it, but when he had worked himself into the crowd he had only to let himself drift along towards the Rue Droite. Elbowing the others and bowed himself, and above all charmed by this rough promiscuity, Julien went on amid an innumerable multitude, trying in vain to discern a face he knew among the moving mass of people.

Folies say that Paris revolutionaries are always benighted by the appearance in the better parts of the city of a crowd of soldiers, who present the emotion of barbarians, just as cross animals are excited by the grating of wheels. This time, however, the invasion of the Boulevard seemed of a less sinister character. The unusual faces which had appeared were almost all beardless, though they had the appearance of emerging from the depths of the city. Parties of suspicious-looking youths came about in single file, holding on to one another by their long white blouses, and passing through the crowd, singing filthy songs to patriotic airs. You would have thought that all the ruffians and pot-boys of the city had been recruited to form an army of disorder. At that time, indeed, the white blouse was almost equivalent to a uniform, and its wearers

had been already seen at work three months previously, when they had smashed the Boulevard kiosks and lamps. Who had recruited them, and thrown them upon Paris, with instructions to disturb honest folks and masquerade in favour of a declaration of war? No one has ever known, and M. de Brannes's nephew was unable even to make a guess, though he scrutinised the fellows closely. If any one questioned them they replied by insulting names in slang, and if an arrest was attempted, they slipped away like adders. Julien, furious at their impudence, was unspringing in his elbow thrusts, and such was his exasperation that he would willingly have come to open blows with them; however, he could not find a chance to chastise any of them, and without any fighting he at length reached the vicinity of the Passage de l'Opéra. This was the real centre of the tumult. The footway here is the favourite meeting-place of open-air speculators, who brave the inclemency of the seasons, to traffic after dinner on the credit of States. And, at this supreme hour, when France was about to risk her power, her very existence, in a colossal struggle, never had a finer occasion presented itself to these gamblers who staked on victory or defeat. They had no preference, and were patriotic or unpatriotic according to their "engagements." The "bears" shamelessly desired war and a long series of disasters. Their dream was that the French army might lose a battle on the eve of each settlement. Really, the fellows in the white blouses were not as bad as that!

As the two streams of speculators and rioters collided, it resulted that, between the Rue Drouot and the Rue Le Peletier, there was a seething mass of people, who revolved round and round like in a whirlpool. There was knocking and pushing, and a horrible vociferous clamour, in which Bourse quotations were mingled with verses of the *Marseillaise*; the speculators' shouts rising above the singing.

Julien could stand it no longer. He had put up with being hustled by the fellows in blouses, but he disliked being brushed against by money-jobbers, and he tried to break loose from the crowd by gaining the macadamised roadway; however, it was still harder to get off the footway than to get on it. Indeed, Julien soon realised that he was so well entangled in the crowd, that he would have great difficulty in breaking free from it, in spite of all his vigour and skill. By dint of giving several rough blows to those who pressed too closely round him, he succeeded in getting a little nearer the roadway, but only to find himself caught in a compact group of speculators, from whom it was still harder to escape.

These folks shouted and struggled to such a degree that Julien was simultaneously deafened and squeezed. It was in vain he used his elbows, he did not get a foot further. On the contrary, he was completely surrounded and driven little by little against a kiosk occupied by a newspaper vendor. Then, for the first time since he had found himself among this disreputable rabble, it suddenly occurred to him, that the people pressing around, had evil designs upon his person. It was his first glance at their faces that made him think this. They all had an evil expression of countenance; hooked noses, flat faces, pointed beards or spreading whiskers. By a sort of intuition, La Chanterie at once remembered M. Wassmann and kept on his guard, that is to say, he crossed his arms over his chest, so as to protect his pockets.

It was a wise precaution, for he almost directly felt some hands stealing over his person, with the evident intention of searching him. Did these hands belong to some common pick-pocket in search of money? Under any other circumstances the Count de Brannes's nephew would not have doubted it; for he had very strong ideas on the morality of the folks who swarm in these parts.

he also knew that the famous letter was in his pocket-book, under the left-hand flap of his frock coat, and that if he was not careful it would be stolen from him.

There was nothing to prove that the pushing and jostling feeling of his men, were not a continuation, or rather the renewal in an other form, of the tumult made at his dwelling place on the preceding night. M. Wassmann's valets having discovered nothing in the cupboards or his rooms in the Rue Verneuil, had concluded that he carried the document which they wished to pry about his person, and they were now proceeding by this chance meeting to reach his clothes, after having uselessly rummaged all his drawers. It was quite possible that he had been followed ever since the morning, without being aware of it; tracked as police-officers call it, and that on the moment he mixed with the crowd an attack had been planned on his person. The young lawyer made all these reflections in less time than it takes to record them, and he related his actions to the thought. Without a word to the unmannerly fellows who pressed so hard upon him he began by administering some roughish kicks. Then, when by the help of this violence he had made a little more room for himself, he freed his right arm, without ceasing, however, to keep the left one tightly pressed against the pocket containing the precious document. Finally, with his muscular "biceps" he held it without further ceremony a rapid series of blows on such noses as were within his reach. His antagonists drew back with loud exclamations of pain and anger, knocking over some people who stood behind them, and the tumult becoming a general one, Julien espied serious faces which he had previously been unable to see. By the light of a street lamp which illuminated the scene he even recognized the tenant of the Pavillon des Soldats in the centre of a knot of people near by. The men who surrounded this suspicious personage were of better appearance than the ruffians with whom Julien had just been struggling. They were German bankers as far as one could judge by their faces. Wassmann, being a millionaire, probably held many valuable securities, and he was no doubt very much interested in the mad speculations then going on, as a rise or fall might greatly affect the value of his property. His presence here could thus be very easily explained. However, Julien felt none the less certain that the tenant of the Pavillon des Soldats was actuated by other and much less allowable motives. Still he did not think it a bad time for questioning him, but considered himself lucky to be able to get out of his difficulty without further trouble. One masterly blow of his fist sufficed to clear him a way through the crowd, whereupon he started behind the newspaper kiosk, slid between two vehicles, and hurried off down the Boulevard, being followed only by the curses of the fellows he had vanquished. Moreover their shouts were soon drowned in the general hubbub, and the plucky fellow was able to reach the opposite side of the thoroughfare in safety. He had not for an instant withdrawn his left hand from over his chest, and his pocket-book was still quite safe.

He was once more able to breathe, but on recovering himself he did not feel it all easy as to the future. If his suppositions were correct, and not mere shadowy fears, if he had rightly believed M. Wassmann to be at the bottom of all he had gone through, the struggle was only beginning, and seemed likely to be a warm one. He feared nothing for his own person, but he was not so easy as regarded the fragmentary letter which chance had placed in his hands. How could he safely keep this paper on which all his hopes of success depended? Where could he secret it so as to baffle the ambitious attempts of men who in their efforts to obtain possession of it, did not hesitate to commit either a burglary, or an aggravated assault?

Julien again asked himself whether he would not do better to finish as he ought to have begun, that is, to simply place the letter in the hands of the investigating magistrate. However, this course seemed to him like throwing up the lead, renouncing the mission that Gabrielle had entrusted to him, and deserting the cause of an innocent man whom he had sworn to defend. He said to himself that there would always be plenty of time to adopt this course when the Assizes were near at hand, supposing he could not then throw additional light on the case. The production of this letter, the contents of which so ill accorded with the theory of Robert's guilt, might influence the verdict in his favour, and in any case its production would be of assistance in the defence.

Thus M. de la Chanterie determined to defer handing it to the authorities. But he realised that it was necessary he should get rid of it as soon as possible, and secure it in some place of safety for fear of its being stolen from him. But who would accept such a trust? To whom could he apply on so delicate a matter? After prolonged reflection he could only think of the curé of Charly. M. Jean was a man to understand the reasons which Julien could give him, and moreover, he was a person whose discretion could be relied upon. La Chanterie accordingly made up his mind to go and see him at the parsonage the very next day, to explain to him the exact state of matters, and win his consent to accept the trust. The paper was placed without any one's knowledge in the hands of the worthy priest, the young advocate would then be able to defy all M. Wassmann's attempts. A fresh burglary might be committed in his rooms, or an attempt made to plunder him out of doors, but at all events the letter would not be taken from him.

Delighted at his idea—still more so at the thought that he had twice spoiled his formidable antagonist's little game—Julien went towards the club, where he felt sure of seeing Wassmann again. He was anxious to observe him more closely, and on neutral ground where he could study him at his ease. He particularly wished to see what his demeanour would be when chance (which chance, he, Julien, meant to bring about), led the conversation to the subject of the gatherings on the boulevard.

It was growing late, and the club being situated at some distance from the Passage de l'Opéra, there was only just time for Julien to get there by midnight, even if he walked fast. He put his best foot foremost and reached the Madeleine without meeting with any further adventure. The nearer he got to the Champs Elysées, the more the crowd and the uproar diminished, for the rioters had naturally selected that part of Paris where there is most traffic of an evening, and did not wander far from it. Their pretended enthusiasm for war needed plenty of spectators to back it up. Julien took care to turn round once or twice to see if any one were following him, but he caught sight of nothing either suspicious or doubtful. He was in no danger of attack in this neighbourhood, and the remainder of his walk was quite uneventful.

The club was located in a splendid house most brilliantly lighted up, and from its windows, which had been opened on account of the extreme heat, there came a sound of voices engaged in animated conversation, proof positive that the gathering was a pretty large one. M. de la Chanterie walked into the hall, where he found a squad of sumptuously attired footmen, who were discussing the latest news given in the evening papers. However, at Julien's request one of them hurried off to fetch the Viscount de Brannes, who appeared a minute later with that beaming expression of countenance which sits so well on an officer who has the prospect of a campaign before him. He at once took his cousin's arm, and guided him up the fine

crease which led to the reception rooms of the club. "You've dropped in in time," he said; "our president, and all of my friends who voted and passed for you, are here. In five minutes you will have been duly introduced, and made at home."

Julien allowed himself to be led off, and Henri, having made him cross a long gallery and a reading room, introduced him into an immense *salon*, where the first person he espied was M. Wessmann, who was holding forth in the midst of an attentive audience. Julien felt somewhat surprised to see him there, for he had left him in front of the *Passage de l'Opéra*, busy with financial transactions, and he had hardly expected to find him, less than an hour afterwards, engaged in a grave discussion on the likelihood of war, all forming the centre of a group in the large red drawing room of the club. Only enough M. Wessmann was a very active man, as quick in changing occupation as his costume. He had given good proof of the latter in the *chêne* woods.

However, the captain did not give his cousin time to deliberate on the point. He took his arm again, and made him go through the usual round of introductions, about which there was no solemnity, for they were limited, as usual there, to handshakes and the exchange of a few polite remarks in different parts of the room. Moreover, M. de la Chastelle was widely known to most of those he had to thank, so that his introduction was a matter of pure form. He took quite at home, and was not at all embarrassed in speaking to people who belonged to his own set, and regarded him as one of themselves. The club to which Henri had secured his admission was composed of men of various kinds, fast fellows, solid people, important officials, and infatuated politicians; all being, however, distinguished or large dated from the Restoration; and many and happy they were rather before the times than behind them; literary men were rather numerous, some of them being of high rank; all of them, such as Comte de Brannes, occupied prominent positions by reason of their talents and high family connections. The bar had, so far, not been represented, but Julien had not been admitted on the strength of his social position. His wit and disposition would have won him all suffrages even if he had not been related to Henri de Brannes.

This young staff-officer, son of a rich and aristocratic count, was a general favourite at the club. The great advantage of his refined manners and perfect courtesy. They could not resist him for his unswerving honour and military spirit. He was the life and soul of the groups which collected every evening in cosy corners to chat over all sorts of burning subjects; whilst the old boys played at whist, and the politicians discussed the questions of the day in front of the fireplace.

Julien, of course, reaped the benefit of his cousin's popularity, and found himself cordially welcomed by young and old members alike. Only he had no time to converse at any length with his new friends, for, as soon as the necessary formalities had been gone through, Henri de Brannes drew him hurriedly aside, to talk to him. La Chastelle had expected something of the kind, and half-guessed what his cousin wished to speak to him about. He followed him off to be led on to the balcony, though he would have preferred to mingle with the throng gathered around M. Wessmann. However, he comforted himself by reflecting that the captain's confidence would certainly take him to the *Pavillon des Serres*, and he hundreds of other sets, so that the conversation would not stay far from the subject in which he was so greatly interested. He was not mistaken in his surmise.

"My dear fellow," began Henri, as soon as they were comfortably leaning

against the balcony railing, beyond the hearing of indiscreet listeners, "I want to ask your advice."

"Advice!" repeated Julien, not without a slight expression of amusement. "You know well enough that people only ask for advice in order to steer clear of it."

"That depends on what it's about," said the captain, evasively. "I own I have often acted quite contrary to the advice I've received, but just now I'm perfectly earnest in what I say to you, and I thoroughly intend to rely on your counsel and experience."

"If it's anything to do with love affairs my advice won't count for much; and as for my experience, you are two years ahead of me, and have done a lot more campaigning than I have in the land of flirtation."

"Oh! pray don't go the schoolboy tack. You navigated amid the Paris shoals and breakers when I was still a cadet at Saint-Cyr, so you must be quite able to help me."

"I assure you I am but a poor doctor in such matters."

"All right. I know what to believe my good fellow; and, between ourselves, the fact that you have been going in for a steady life during the last six months isn't a reason why you should forget all about old times, especially as you have not got such a clean bill after all. Don't alarm yourself: I shan't tell Gabrielle that I applied to you, any more than I ever told her of a certain boating expedition."

"I don't see what your sister has got to do with this," said Julien, warmly; "let me know what you want, as you are so determined on this point. I'll answer as well as I can."

"That's a proper reply. Very well then, it is a question of a fascinating young person whom you recently had the luck to admire on the banks of the Marne on a certain awfully hot day, when you had been hunting a man in my father's wood."

"Mademoiselle Wassmann you mean. I agree with you, she is charming," said Julien, without the least display of enthusiasm.

"Much more so than you are aware, my dear fellow," exclaimed the captain. "I know her now and can appreciate her worth. I didn't play the fool like you did, but duly called at the Pavillon des Sorbiers. Mademoiselle Catherine is a real beauty, an out-and-outer. I won't say anything about her looks as you've seen her, but she has all the wit and grace of a Frenchwoman, with just a touch of wistful melancholy, which puts the finish on her perfection. Besides, she was born at Vienna, and the Viennese are no more like other Germans than a rose is like a poppy."

"Granted! But probably, you don't want my opinion as to her physical and intellectual merits? How are you now situated as regards this feminine marvel?"

"We have reached the point when one understands one another without need of talking; and when eyes own what lips dare not say; in fact, when one feels that one loves, and only waits for a good chance to write it or declare it by word of mouth."

"That Mademoiselle Wassmann loves you I'm quite ready to believe; but that you yourself are really in love with her seems more doubtful to me."

"Pray what makes you think that?"

"Because I doubt whether you could ever fall seriously in love; but let's hear what you want to know."

"Very good, my dear fellow, I think that if I care to become the son-in-law of a foreign gentleman who is a millionaire, three or four times over, and father

most charming girl I ever met, I have only to ask for his consent, and, as ever you like to say, I entertain a very deep and sincere affection for her, I feel tempted to take the irrevocable step."

"What prevents you?" asked Julien, rather coolly.

"That prevents me? Really you are too bad! Why, deuce take it, a heap of things prevent me. In the first place there's my father, who always doesn't like his son-in-law; I have never been able to find out why, by the bye, for he never makes much of him, if as you have, and takes a great deal of little snivel for a much better. I hope, however, that even you have given up that idea. Well, for all I rather hesitate to make the plunge."

"Only you're quite right, for there's another reason why you should not marry her. I am sure I wish you had not even hinted to me—and yet it is sufficient to deter you from making a proposal."

"What's that?"

"Why, don't war close at hand! I suppose you don't reckon upon stopping any longer in Paris, all through the campaign in Prussia?"

"Certainly not; on the contrary, I hope to be attached to the head-quarters, and be one of the first to leave Paris."

"Well, I must say that this prospect is not quite in keeping with your matrimonial intentions."

"Pooh! The war will all be over in two or three months at the most; it isn't just long enough to win one or two battles; after our second victory we shall have reached the left bank of the Rhine; and at the worst, even if she is a truce for it, we shall press on to Berlin. At all events, everything is finished for the moment; I shall come back with a rise in rank and in time to be married before the winter; only, if I want to acquaint my father-in-law with my intentions, I have no time to lose."

"What! You are well," cried Julien; "you also have the silly idea in your head, that this war will be a short and easy one!"

"Ah! I am, you're one of those who talk about the Prussians like children of bodies! I know all about it—Prussian strategy, eh? and tactics, eh? then the *Landwehr*, an army of old tailors and bootmakers—very dreadful, eh? but believe me, it's dead to flow, keep these fears for yourself and your dear leaves, and leave the fighting to the army men."

"I shall see to it as well," said La Chenerie softly, "for no doubt they soon call out the *Garde Mobile*."

"Oh! we've not got to that yet," exclaimed the captain; "and I am greatly grieved that you won't have the chance of being under fire."

"Perhaps not; but you speak of marrying Mademoiselle Wassmann, as if you were a Frenchman. Are you quite sure her father won't cross the frontier, when the war—which is almost upon us—is declared?"

"What, no! don't you know then that he was wounded at Sadowna, and escapes the Prussians? Ah! he would never leave France at such a moment—brave Austria that he is! No, no, he is quite on our side, and proclaims it loudly. Just listen to what he is saying about it now," said the captain, going round towards the room, where M. Wassmann was still holding forth, as if he did not regret the diversion. Firstly, as he hoped that the change of feet would enable him to shirk a direct answer to his cousin's questions; secondly, he was most anxious to listen to, and closely observe, the man who had applied his mind to such a degree, and whom he had only once heard speak, therefore lent a willing ear to M. Wassmann's talk, and even left the room and took a few steps across the room in order to lose nothing of his sentence.

"Yes, gentlemen," the noble foreigner was saying, "Prussia will be utterly beaten, I'll answer for it, and shamefully beaten. She is not in a position to hold out for three months."

"It is asserted that she can put as many as six hundred thousand men in the field," timidly suggested a official of the Council of State.

"Of whom three hundred thousand belong to the militia, which five or six of your divisions would utterly rout," proceeded M. Wassmann not in the least disconcerted. "Those fellows form regiments, recruited in the provinces, commanded by burgo-masters, who lead them in a patriarchal kind of way, as they would in the little towns whence they come. I leave you to guess if they will go under fire with very brittle hearts! And then you forget that in Prussia the harvest begins in the month of August, so that in three weeks' time these fine soldiers of the *landwehr* will dart off like hares to go and cut their rye."

"Hah! what did I tell you?" whispered the captain to Julien.

"What!" replied Julien, in an undertone; "with all your good sense, you a staff-officer, are satisfied with such reasoning as that, and believe in such utter nonsense!"

"On this point, gentlemen, you may take the word of an old soldier, who is thoroughly acquainted with the German army," added M. Wassmann, raising his voice, as if he wanted to be heard by the two cousins. "This war will be mere child's play for France; and if your Government hesitated over it, it would be very much to blame, for it would lose an excellent chance of coming to a final understanding with the Prussians, who are the worst soldiers in the whole of Germany."

"Permit me," said the same interrupter as before, "it seems to me that but four years ago, in June, 1866, it was said that the Austrians would beat the Prussians, and yet——"

"While we ourselves were beaten," put in the ex-major of the Austrian army; "well, and what does that prove? That we are badly led, and that our commander-in-chief had an absurd plan. Do you want a proof of it? Then just listen to this story, which is well known in our part of the world, though I fancy that it is not familiar to you. The commander's plan was kept a secret till the commencement of hostilities; but as its originator was very highly thought of, the army and the nation had perfect confidence in it. However, a few days before the beginning of the campaign the inhabitants of Prague, the capital of Bohemia, were greatly surprised to witness the hasty departure of the old Emperor Ferdinand, the uncle of our august sovereign. The Emperor Ferdinand had always resided in their town since his abdication, and, in fact, he had never once left it. Well, he was asked the reason of his abrupt departure, and it was respectfully represented to him that Bohemia ran no risk of being invaded by the enemy, the famous plan of the campaign having doubtless provided against any such contingency. However, Ferdinand began to laugh, and replied: 'My children, I knew all this fine plan—Benedek's plan; the general himself explained it to me, and it is just because he has explained it to me—that I'm going off.'"

"That Emperor was a clever fellow," exclaimed Henri de Brannes, approaching the group of men who were roaring with laughter over M. Wassmann's story.

"There is nothing to show that France won't have her *Benedek's plan*, too," said Julien, sufficiently loud for the German to overhear and turn round towards him.

Their eyes met and the tenant of the Pavillon des Sorbiers at once showed that he remembered M. de Brannes's nephew, for he smiled upon him most graciously.

ken acknowledged this, smiling by a very self-bow. But he flattered himself, as it he thought, he was not easily rid of the obnoxious man. Captain Henri, who possibly wished to reconcile Dutch with other of the elements of the present of this opportunity, to show the nation that it was not a mere German, but a man of the name, remembering the great success of the German, and had the air of a M. Wassmann, he said, "I am the first to see this," said M. Wassmann, as he had had the first of the world of his reflection, remembering them as well as you had, and I am with lofty disdain, and I regret that I have not previously had an opportunity of renewing acquaintance," answered the foreigner politely."

"For me, I saw you before, but on your own," he said, the young

ate. "Really? Where was that," asked M. Wassmann, seemingly astonished. On the Boulevard, in front of the Palais National, and within a few feet of a crowd of ruffians, who were trying, I believe, to rob me."

Henri de Brames, this answer with such evident intention of insulting the man, that the man, who had been brought to the door, and who was and was to consider and furrow his brow, as if he was playing a trick with him. Henri de Brames, to think of some remarks, intended to change the conversation and to hasten, which in a few days would be a hundred times worse than those seen Napoleon III. and King William of Prussia.

M. Wassmann, in this trouble, however; he did not in the least this time, as he was not of the oblique character of this little which, which had a goodly number of the very same, for they looked at the new collection as they had before, but at a dangerous lunatic. In the meantime, the important man, who was and was to consider and furrow his brow, as if he was playing a trick with him. Henri de Brames, to think of some remarks, intended to change the conversation and to hasten, which in a few days would be a hundred times worse than those seen Napoleon III. and King William of Prussia.

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Stabrielle's brother felt it would be silly for him to quarrel seriously with Julien, and he had the wisdom to let the matter drop and go off to join in the Austrian's game.

As soon as La Chanterie was left alone, and rid of the presence of M. Wassmann, the mere sight of whom so greatly irritated him, he began to think things over, and felt rather ashamed at having let his temper carry him away in so absurd a fashion. He reflected that, for the first time he had gone to the club, he must have given his fellow members a peculiar idea of his character and education, and he especially regretted having lost his self-possession in presence of an enemy who played such a clever game. Julien's reflections on this subject only served to put him in a worse humour than before, as always happens when one is dissatisfied with one's self, and he thought it best to go home to bed without taking leave of his cousin. He was indeed about to retire when three young fellows came out on to the balcony and leant over the balustrade near him. They evidently belonged to that interesting set of dandies whom the Parisians called *petits créés*.* They had sallow faces, their hair was parted down the middle, and they seemed to have drunk more than was good for them. Julien was in no wise inclined to associate with them, and was going away when one of them exclaimed in a loud voice: "Whoever is that young fool who spoke so stupidly just now about France having her *Benedek's plans*?"

"I know nothing of him," replied one of the speaker's companions. "I never saw him here before."

Nothing more than the epithet just articulated was needed to rouse La Chanterie's indignation to a full pitch. "That young fool was myself," he exclaimed, catching hold of the arm of the impudent fellow who had thus described him. "And I mean to have satisfaction for your absurd remarks."

"Oh! this is rich," sneered the young dandy; "upon my word I never even saw you, but don't imagine that I am going to apologize—no, not if I know it!"

"I don't ask you to apologize," shouted M. de la Chanterie; "I only want your card."

"My card! all right, and where's yours?" answered the young dandy. "I don't know who you are."

"I hope not," said Julien, in a very disdainful tone; "you will know me well enough when I have given you the lesson that your impertinence so richly deserves."

"Oh! oh! we shall see all about that on the duelling-ground; and since you want to fight, here is the piece of pasteboard you require," sneered the amiable gentleman, who suddenly seemed to have regained his composure.

The Count de Beunes's nephew took the card which his opponent tendered and placed it in his pocket. "Here is mine," he said. "To-morrow, before noon, my seconds will call upon you."

Thereupon, without waiting for the dandy's reply, he turned his back on him and hastily left the club; for, since the beginning of the altercation it was only by the greatest effort that he had been able to refrain from boxing the coxcomb's ears, and he felt his patience nearly exhausted. He considered, moreover, that he had sufficiently scandalised his new colleagues by his peculiar way of addressing M. Wassmann; and, as he had a well-bred man's horror of everything approaching a scene, he at once left the club, where he

* They would be called "mashers" in England now-a-days. — *Trans.*

made such an awkward *départ*. He did not even take leave of his cousin, for several reasons: first of all the captain was playing whist with M. Jean, when he, Julien, did not care to speak to; and secondly, it did not seem that he should inform Henri of the foolish quarrel he had just made. So he went off quietly, allowing his opponent to triumph over his turn; and as he considered it imprudent to return home on foot after being out all the evening, he hailed a passing cab and was driven to the hotel. There everything was once more in its accustomed order; his valet was in attendance, and at once showed his master that the wig stand in the previous night had been repaired during the day. Mons. Jean then personally found and directed the various workmen; he had had the study to explain how the window and shutters had been broken; and he, in his discretion, and only in the neighbourhood was aware that a very heavy rain had fallen that night at M. de la Chauterie's.

Julien concluded that he had nothing more to fear about the precious letter, as he had decided to entrust it as soon as possible to the curé of Charly, and he retired himself in his room to reflect over the situation in which fortune had placed him. He found himself caught in a quarrel at the time when he most needed to leave his mind clear, and the prospect of a duel, under any other circumstances, would not at all have disturbed him, now it was nearly unavailing. The next day, which he had hoped to devote to André and Gabrieline, would hardly suffice for the preliminaries of the duel, he must also somehow or other contrive to visit M. Jean beforehand to learn to him what he wanted. However, by getting up very early and giving the utmost exertion, he might still find time for all; and, so as to begin at a good hour, he resolved at once to rest, not, however, without giving a stylish look at the mail which he had by the top on the balcony. The name which appeared upon it was quite unknown to him, though it was a very high-sounding one. This illustrious young lady was named Monsieur Achille Miraut de Saint-Avertin, and Julien, who frequented a class of society into which people without distinguished titles were alone admitted, could not recall any aristocratic family of that name.

He could only conclude that a little time before some Miraut or other, who had been a farmer or a glove or button manufacturer, had been seized with a desire to distinguish himself by the name of his native village. This is a common enough custom among people of the middle classes, inimical as they are said to be to titles. In our time, of fifty thousand families people think they have a right to take the name of their native town; with an income of a hundred thousand and nobility, they venture to assume that of their department, and become Monsieur de Cantal or De la Moselle-Savoie; while, when they possess five hundred thousand francs, they found a dynasty, as it were, clinging to the title of some celebrated ancestor, resembling Casimir So-and-So, or the Duke of Alençon. M. de la Chauterie was not at all surprised that he had not encountered these illustrious nobles, and, as it mattered very little to him whether his opponent were descended from a Crusader or a tobacconist, he did not even quite decide to send his seconds to M. Miraut, were the latter fully De Saint-Avertin or not.

Julien concluded on this reflection the next day. He called early in the morning on a friend whom he had selected by reason of his experience in fighting matters. Louis de Troublay, who had been his chum at college and he had known, a great hunting man, and as such the acknowledged chief of the Red Indian Club, was a resourceful fellow, endowed with a strong arm, great skill as a fencer, a determined sportsman, angler, and seeker of

adventures, he was, moreover, well known in the gay world of Paris. In one word, just the very man to see the affair well through. At the first words that Julien spoke he pricked up his ears like a cavalry horse when he hears the bugle sound, and, after a quarter of an hour's conversation, he undertook to procure another "second" to communicate with those chosen by Julien's antagonist, and to arrange matters so that the duel might take place within twenty-four hours.

The young advocate, feeling certain that his representative would properly fulfil his mission, and being much less pre-occupied as to the chances of the duel than as to the safety of the torn letter, repaired that same morning to Chavry. His journey being an uneventful one. He did not even espy the obnoxious face of M. Wassmann, though to reach the parsonage he had to pass in front of the Pavillon des Sorbiers.

M. Jean received Julien with his usual cordiality, and expressed his regret that he had nothing satisfactory to tell him. The poacher, whom he had seen on the previous evening at Mazas, was only spoiling his case by behaving impudently towards the examining magistrate, and speaking most harshly of his wife and children. M. Jean quite despaired of bringing the foolish fellow to a better state of mind and finding any new proofs in his favour. On the other hand, poor Eugénie was greatly distressed at not being able to see her husband, and she was visibly fading away. The worthy people who had received her into their home were now in trouble on their own side. Business was very bad, and what with the rumours of war, Antoine Cornier was greatly embarrassed for want of money. The good priest was, therefore, very sad at heart, and did not hide from M. de la Chanterie that he had no longer any hopes of saving Robert.

Julien thought it useless, for many reasons, to tell him of the recent incidents which so fully confirmed his opinion of M. Wassmann's rascality. He limited himself to saying that nothing was lost, as long as the poacher had not been convicted by the jury : and he handed him a sealed envelope, containing the fragmentary letter, without telling him in what its importance consisted, but begging him to take care of it, until he asked him for it again.

M. Jean promised to do so, and Julien returned to Paris, without putting in an appearance at the château, though it cost him a deal to pass so near to Gabrielle without seeing her. But he mistrusted himself, and feared his charming cousin's skill in making him say everything she chose. As he was naturally anxious that she should not know anything of the duel, he preferred to avoid an interview, in which he might have divulged his secret. However, he quite intended to return to Chavry on the next day, as soon as the business was over. On reaching the Rue de Villette, he found his friend Du Tremblay, who had performed wonders in the way of speech. The duel was fixed for the following morning at five o'clock, on the island of Croissy, and swords were to be used. Du Tremblay had procured the necessary weapons, and had made an appointment with Julien's other second for the same evening at the Saint-Lazare station ; for, according to his plan, they were all three to dine and sleep at Chatou, with which suburban locality he was perfectly well acquainted. He could not have arranged a beating party with greater expedition or care.

The arrangements quite suited Julien. The young lawyer was a fair swordsman ; and preferred the weapon which had been chosen. As to the journey to Chatou, he was not at all sorry to have the prospect of a little recreation before him. The evening before a duel is always somewhat disagreeable from the bare fact of having to prepare your will in case of misadventure. He had no anxiety as to the fate of the precious letter which he had placed in the

of M. Jean. So nothing prevented his accepting the proposal of his friend. He merely took the time to give his valet a few orders, and then left the vehicle, which had brought him to the quay, and his sword.

[illegible]

reine, and was desirous of trying a plunge. He supposed, however, that M. Williams would wear a coat with buttons, and a cap with a silver band. Julian, who was not acquainted with the information given to the magistrate by Digonard, could make nothing of it. However, he was anxious to make sure on the point, and about to open the door and alight, when the block suddenly came to an end, and the vehicle next drove on. Julian, who was on the top, saw it stop before the light of some opposite drawing-rooms, depositing passengers on the first step, and then appearing and re-appearing on the left side of the car. The two men it had conveyed did not show their faces, they alighted, and they even went up the steps without once turning round, so that the only discovery made by the crowd inside the station. Thus, the result of his only reward for his efforts was a stiff neck. In his despair at his failure, he began shouting to the driver to push on, and in so furious a voice. Du Tremblay said to him ;

"Du Tremblay said to him, "Good gracious, not our fellow, what the deuce are you up to? You'll sink the ship—I mean the cab."

[illegible]

"Then the fellow with all those fine names is really a fool after all?" said La Chanterie, absently.

"Of course, you must have found that out at the club. But I think I see Fabrègue over there, making furious signs to us from the top of the steps. Can we have missed the train?"

"Of course we have," said Julien, in a sally tone: "you see that I did right to hurry the driver. These things seem planned to vex me," he added to himself.

The vision of the tawny whiskers still pursued him, and he would not abandon his fancies. Anyway he could not clear up his doubts, for he was only too right about the time; the train was missed by a long way. "Never mind, there's another in twenty-five minutes, and an express one too. So that we shall gain by the exchange," said Du Tremblay, who grieved himself on his philosophy.

The two friends alighted, Julien carrying his travelling bag, and Du Tremblay the wrapper containing the swords. Their friend, Fabrègue, confirmed the news of the train's departure, and twitted them on their indifference, pretending that their cab, in the middle of the yard, had looked like a skiff stranded on a sandbank, and that La Chanterie, at the window, had resembled a sea-sick Englishman, leaning over the boat's side to feel the fishes.

The man who made all these nautical remarks, was a big, strapping fellow, a Languedocian by birth, and an architect by profession, who had served five years with the African contingent, in which he had reached the important rank of quarter-master. Rather older than most of his comrades of the Red Indian Club, he exercised a certain amount of authority over them, especially during their exploring expeditions on the banks of the two Parisian rivers, the Seine and the Marne. Fabrègue was the winning organizer of all these parties, and also the inventor of the queer nicknames by which the joyous troop called one another while on their tours. He and Du Tremblay had, of course, formed part of the expedition on the Marne during the previous month, when Julien had so unexpectedly found himself face to face with his uncle and had witnessed the capture of the poacher.

The train was going at full steam through the tunnel under the Place de l'Europe, and La Chanterie and his two seconds, being too late for it, were condemned to pace up and down the waiting room until admittance was granted to the platform. Fabrègue profited by this delay to explain the programme he had planned for the trip to the Isle of Croissy. "My young buffaloes," he said, with the volubility and amusing manner of a child of the South, "I have arranged everything, so that the evening preceding the battle shall not be deficient in amusement. Our rooms are retained at old Cabassut's, who rises gudgeon so well. We shall reach his house at six o'clock exactly; we will leave our bags and traps, give a look round the kitchen, and then set off for the water-side. It will be just the time for a bath. We'll pull a stroke down the Seine up to seven o'clock, and as soon as we are dressed again we will betake ourselves to the *Frolicsome Gudgeon*, where we shall partake of Cabassut's hospitality. Eels and stewed rabbit, washed down with some white wine, which isn't at all bad; then —"

"I hope you didn't ask all the crew of the *Épave*," put in Julien, who had no especial wish to feast with his fellow-buffaloes, and who, moreover, half thought that, under the circumstances, Fabrègue's programme was a little wanting in decorum.

"What do you take me for? Do you think I am going to propose taking

to the Boulevard ball on the evening before a duel? The deuce! a duel is all, and when a fellow wants to get up with a ready hand and eye, he has to go to bed early. Besides, although it is well to put a good face on the matter, a man always feels glad to be left a little to himself on the night before an encounter of the kind."

"And as a precaution in case of any accident," added Du Tremblay.

"Well, it is such a hurry, that I had no time to make any preparations," Julien said. "And I confess that I want to employ part of the evening in bed. If my evening had been opened to me, my uncle would never forgive me for going off to get killed without wishing him good-bye."

"And Julien de la Brague, too?" exclaimed Fabrègue, who was somewhat worried in discretion; "but it's agreed and understood. After the little arrangement which you will take in common, you shall do as you like with your time. If Du Tremblay and I grow tired, we will fence a bit with words, and amuse ourselves. But listen to the finish of my programme. I go as Aurora, with her rosy fingers——"

"I draw it mild, and say at four o'clock; it's clearer that way."

"At four o'clock, then, as you don't like mythology, old Cabassut's boat will be waiting for us, and will convey us to the island opposite, a spot which is suitable for the duel. Having twice availed myself of it on my own account, I know it as well as I know the poop of the *Éperlan*. We shall of course be the first to arrive, and shall have the extreme delight of watching Cabassut's triumphant passage across the river. It never does to be late in matters of this kind. That's a principle of mine," gravely added the ex-quarter-master.

"You are quite right, and your plans suit me perfectly," said Julien. "Let's start our business now and let me off, so that your plans may not undergo any unforeseen alteration."

"Thinking of plans," resumed Fabrègue, "it was the discussion of Benedek's plans that excited all the quarrel, wasn't it? I didn't know that you were so aptable on the question of strategy."

"Benedek's plans led my adversary to make some most impertinent remarks, and I put an end to pretty quickly."

"Yes, I know; you told him that he was a fool. That was pretty stiff, but perfectly correct, and I am not the one to gainsay it, for I learnt a long time ago not to think of the fellow."

"Then you already knew Saint Avertin?" asked La Chanterie, eagerly. "I was all the more anxious to obtain some information respecting his adversary, as a curious suspicion had suddenly flashed upon his mind."

"Certainly, I know him," said Fabrègue, "and his seconds too. I'll tell you about it on the road."

Julien restrained his impatience, and allowed the ex-quarter-master to take his time. The waiting-room was hardly the place for the young advocate to listen to the biography of his opponent, and however much he wished to be enlightened on the subject, he realised that it was best to wait for the departure of the train, and not to discuss so personal a subject till out of the hearing of bystanders. He had favoured the trio, who found an unoccupied compartment, and at once climbed into it. "Well?" asked La Chanterie, as soon as the train began to steam out of the station and the friends were assured of no interruption—"Well, who is this Saint Avertin, whose name I never heard of before?"

"Well, it would be a very funny thing if you had; the Saint Avertin part of his cognomen has only figured on his cards during the last year or so, and

even in the fast society which he frequents, people have not yet grown quite accustomed to it."

"Then his name really is not Saint Avertin?"

"Yes it is, only any number of people pronounce it Miraut."

"Come, Fabrege, no joking. I am deeply interested in being correctly informed on this subject. What is the fellow's real name? Where does he come from? What does he do? Who are his relatives?"

"You're too fast. Stop a bit, and don't mix up your questions if you want clear answers. Be methodical, my good fellow. That's an excellent principle to go upon both in fencing and conversation."

"You are exaggerating its importance just now," said Julien, laughing, "and I should be very grateful to you to come to the point."

"I'm quite willing. You first of all want to know what name your opponent inherited from his forefathers, who were, I believe, vine growers in the neighbourhood of Paris. All right, his name was Miraut, neither more nor less."

"Miraut?" repeated Du Tremblay, who was fond of saying something jocular in the gravest possible manner; "why, the fellow must be descended from a sporting dog."

"Let's be serious," continued Fabrege; "this Miraut is afflicted with the christian name of Achille, as you may have already seen on his card."

"Good! and how did he get the surname of Saint Avertin?" asked La Chanterie.

"I don't exactly know, but I have every reason to believe that, when an infant, he was put out to nurse in a village of that name, a circumstance which, as you must own, would give him every right to place himself under the protection of that saint."

"All right; now let us hear about his origin."

"His origin? you know it—son of a vine-grower, not a vine-grower himself."

"Your jokes are unbearable. He has a large fortune, then?"

"He has, or rather he had some seven or eight thousand francs a year when he first came to Paris, about four years ago."

"Then he has made money at the Bourse, or elsewhere?"

"Not at the Bourse I fancy; elsewhere, perhaps. But what I am quite sure of is, that during the first three years that he knocked about the Boulevards he spent three-fourths of his capital."

"How can that be? He sups, and gambles, and bets on the race."

"Quite so; and you may at once say that he spends from fifty to sixty thousand francs a year."

"Where does he get them?"

"He alone could give you precise information on that point; but it is probable that he is very discreet. However, everyone knows that he has always been extremely lucky at cards."

"Then he is a professional blackleg?"

"No; first of all everyone can't become a card-sharper—it's quite a natural gift to know how to cheat; secondly, blacklegs always end by being caught, and never has Monsieur Miraut—whether he is a Saint-Avertin or not—been caught or suspected of cheating."

"Well, then, what is his secret, for you won't persuade me that his run of luck comes by chance."

"By chance, no; but by a certain amount of skill, yes. He is expert in all kinds of games, and always arranges to play against novices, and against people who have dined too freely or already lost a good deal. It is a very paying proceeding, and is considered to be allowable."

"Very wrongly so, I think."

"And so do I; but to return to our young friend. At a club to which he belonged—previous to being admitted to yours—he invented the dodge of going to bed before nine o'clock at night, and getting up at four in the morning, so as to reach the gambling table fresh and rested. He only found the weary losers there, stupified by keeping such late hours and by a constant run of ill-luck. It's needless for me to add, that he always had the best of them, and never failed to finish them off."

"How abominable!"

"The most abominable thing out. But that does not prevent certain people from calling it 'profiting by one's advantage.' I simply call it 'robbing.' French is plainer and shorter language."

"And more appropriate. But speaking of clubs, just tell me how this gentleman got into your club, where there are so many honourable members?"

"Ah, my good fellow, there's the rub; it's a mystery such as you often come across in Paris. Miraut had no money to carry him through, so he coined it, and no one troubled to ascertain if he had any right to it. He had no time, and acted just as if he had a very large one. There is nothing like having on one's capital so as to throw dust in people's eyes, and thus make one's hands. Miraut has always paid his debts of honour, and has always carefully kept within the provisions of the law. He has become Saint Avertin without right to the name being disputed. However, I must confess that all his money would not have sufficed to admit him into good society if he had not managed to effect an entry by some chance which I know nothing of. For last year or so there has been a great change in his mode of life. People who formerly didn't even bow to him now treat him in a friendly way. He has displayed his person in the drawing-rooms of some wealthy foreigners. He has even been seen patronising diplomatic fêtes. Nobody has ever thought much of him, but nobody has said anything particular against him. By the help of two or three college friends, he has ended by getting into your club."

"It's marvellous!" said Julien.

"And don't deceive yourself," answered Fabrique. "He now has in the end plenty of friends who will maintain that he is the most worthy fellow in the world; and you would do very wrong if you took any exception as to his situation or standing, so as to decline fighting a duel with him."

"I have no earthly idea to shrink this duel," said La Chénierie.

"I know that very well, but I should have been glad if I could have prevented it, for I know Monsieur Miraut, and I know that it's not a fair fight between him and you, as he will never risk anything but a shaver's skin; never, after due reflection I realised we had no allowable reason for a duel to fight, and Du Tremblay agreed with me."

"Quite so," said the friend appealed to.

"You have acted for the best, and I thank you for it," exclaimed Julien. Besides, rest assured I shall vigorously defend my skin as an honourable member of society. But you, Fabrique, where the deuce did you learn all this about scamp?"

"Oh! my dear fellow, I picked up a little everywhere. You know architecture leaves me plenty of leisure time, and I employ it in going about into all sorts of sets, especially those in which I get most amusement. My poor father when he died left me a sufficient income to allow me to leave the *1st* Régiment and the *Chasseurs*, and merely build houses as a dilettante. I make use of my money to explore various grades of society, as the new papers say. It is a

kind of geology of which I never tire, and which teaches me a good deal. It has enabled me to discover some curious specimens, unfortunately *not* fossils. For Saint Avertin is quite a modern piece of goods. You ask me where I have met him? Why! at the theatres; out shooting; at Mubille; with fine women; in the fencing-rooms; and, by the by, the gentleman is a pupil of Pons, our foremost fencing-master. Oh! he isn't a pupil of the first water, but he knows enough for me to advise you to be on your guard. He parries badly, but he knows a few nasty thrusts fairly well."

"I will do my best," said Julien, calmly. He now knew pretty well all that he had wished to learn, and he let the conversation drop. The information supplied him by Fabrègue, had only served to increase his former suspicions, and his imagination ran riot more than ever, haunted by the idea that his opponent was an accomplice of M. Wassmann. He recalled, among other circumstances connected with the quarrel, the singular fact that the young fop, who had seemed rather the worse for liquor when he reached the club balcony, had suddenly become sober again after the exchange of cards.

While Julien was thus reflecting the train tore along, and after rushing through two stations, it drew up at that of Rueil, which was the nearest one to old Cabassut's hostelry. The three friends alighted from the train, and at once walked off towards the inn known as the *Frolisome Gudgeon*. As a matter of course the suspicious whiskers of the man in livery were not seen again during the journey.

VII.

THE station of Rueil, where Julien and his seconds alighted, is situated at some distance from the village of that name. On the other hand, it is close to the Seine, which is spanned by the railway bridge, but a few hundred yards further on. On leaving the station, the friends did not follow the high road, but struck off along a path to their right, which crosses the fields and leads to the river. Just where it joins the road skirting the Seine the inn of the *Frolisome Gudgeon* displays its modest whitewashed frontage and the bright green arbours of its little garden. Above the door there swings a sign painted by some wandering dauber, who has given way to various extraordinary freaks of colouring on this board, which is some three feet square. An apple-green gudgeon is to be seen capering about in deep blue water, as if it were deriding an angler who wears a scarlet waistcoat and yellow breeches. In the background a cook, dressed in white from head to foot, and holding a saucepan in his hand, watches the capering gudgeon with a grin on his face, as if desirous of intimating that these frolicsome capers will soon end in the frying-pan. The artist was, perhaps, actuated by a praiseworthy desire to express something philosophical in thus reminding the many frequenters of the place how short are the pleasures of life. Perhaps, however, he simply gave way to his fantastic ideas of colouring, and took pleasure in assembling within so small a space the most varied tints and boldest contrasts. At all events he painted the sky violet and the trees black, and whatever his purpose may have been, his work has certainly brought good luck to the owner of the establishment, for old Cabassut has made a fortune.

At the time we write of, when war had not yet ravaged the suburbs of Paris, his house had a tidy and inviting look to all such people as repaired on foot to examine the machine constructed at Marly for raising the water of the Seine. Moreover, few boatmen going up or down the stream were able to resist the seductions of the trim garden, where you could drink a bright clear

under the shade of the acacia trees; and the boating men out for a long day's fresh-water cruise never disdained to cast anchor before the little stry. You often found there newspaper men out for a holiday, lovers in quest of solitude, and poets hunting for rhymes. The boats also came now and then, swarming the number of customers. The boatsmen's fishing went on in the woody islands, which extended down the river from La Chapelle Chatou, and far further. Cabassut maintained the traditions of the old restaurants of the Île de la Boulogne, where in distant times landlords catered for duchesses, just as nowadays they cater for wedding parties. They provided beds and bandages in the event of a serious result, and excellent lunches if the encounter ended peacefully in a few sentences, or was averted by a pacific "arrangement"; and Cabassut followed their example: in case of need, moreover, the worthy fellow, who had once been in the army, gave a few fencing lessons to any rices who required his assistance, and he was in a position to supply impenitent patrons with house-pisoids or with rods, from which the buttons had been removed. In case of necessity he would have also provided seconds.

F Julien and his friends but needed merely to have recourse to his kitchen department, which, moreover, enjoyed a great and well-deserved reputation. When he appeared on the river bank the landlord of the *Prolicesome tradition* was taking a pipe on the threshold of his establishment, and as soon as he saw him he bowed with mingled respect and familiarity.

"He numbered Pélissier and De Trémolay among his very best customers, and La Chauxvi was not unknown to him, though he boated less frequently than his comrades on the fine waters of Creissy.

"I'll have the two first rooms on the first floor for you, gentlemen," said the landlord's helper. "At what time do you gentlemen wish to dine?"

"Well, it is a shame, Cabassut," said Du Trémolay, "just now we only want your boat, to take a pull down the river and have a bathe."

"It's a fine day, that with such hot sun, one goes to take a bathe to sitting down to dinner. Besides, it will give you a good appetite for the fine fish, which was brought me only this morning from Poissy—a magnificent fish."

"I'll have the first room, and look after the stewed rabbit," put in Brègue, who had always a weakness for the latter dish.

"And get the three rooms to our rooms," said Du Trémolay.

"O.K.!" said the landlord's helper, from the wrapper which contained the orders, "we have a little business on, have we?"

"Just a little transaction, Cabassut; oh! quite a little one."

"Is it coming off this evening?"

"Ah, no! It would be too tight to fight it out tonight in your parts, within two miles of La Chauxvi. We don't want to amuse the society that collects there."

"Quite right. And there might be folks ready to fetch the gentlemen. So it is fixed for to-morrow morning?"

"At five o'clock precisely, my dear Cabassut."

"Good; you shall be called at four, and François shall be waiting in the boat to row you over. When a man is going into action it's a bit take to row; besides the steadiness of his boat. You will go to the same place as before, I suppose."

"Of course! I only know one good spot, in the middle of the island of La Gauscée."

"Well, really you couldn't find a better. There are some tall poplars, which prevent anyone seeing you from the river banks, and a stretch of ground as

level as the floor of a fencing school. But I say, Monsieur Fabrègue, so you're always getting mixed up in something of the kind. Upon my word, when I received your tel gram just now, I thought I could guess what your business was. Without indiscretion on my part, is it the same kind of case as last time, something to do with one of the ladies of the *Éperlan*?"

"No, it's not I who am going to fight to-morrow," broke in Fabrègue.

"Nonsense!"

"No, it's this gentleman," added the Southerner, pointing to Julien.

"Really! so much the better. The gentleman will see what a nice place it is, and come back to see us again."

La Chanterie, who was but indifferently affected by this interested invitation, did not trouble to reply, and Du Tremblay, realising that his friend took no pleasure in listening to old Cabassut's gossip, proposed that they should proceed without further delay to that salutary recreation, bathing. The boat was there, made fast to a stake, and the young fellows had only to descend the bank to reach it. They did so. Du Tremblay, who was a first-rate hand with the oars, undertook to row, and pulled the boat out quickly into mid-stream. It was agreed he should continue managing it, while his two friends were in the water, and that he should take his dip afterwards. Julien asked for nothing better than to plunge into the water, for he was dying of heat, and he also felt great need of corporal exercise to drive away the black thoughts which assailed him. Those carrotty whiskers, espied at the railway station in Paris, still haunted him, do what he would, and he began to think himself quite a fool to attach such importance to the shade and cut of a stranger's hirsute adornment. He had certainly much better think about his duel, and while he was undressing he glanced at the island which his friend Fabrègue had selected for the encounter. It was the first one down stream, after the island spanned by the railway bridge, and the largest in sight. Up the river there is a bathing establishment, principally frequented by the weaker sex, and known in the gay world by the expressive and unpoetical name of La Chrenouillère—the men's resort—while looking down the stream there are several shady deserted nooks which are suited in every respect to duelling. The scenery all around is delightful, and towards evening when the sun sinks behind the dense woods which cover the heights of Louveciennes and Marly, when the willows on the bank are mirrored in the stream, which is tinged with crimson by the glow of the sunset, you would think you were a hundred miles from the Boulevard des Italiens. Du Tremblay had let the boat drift with the current, and they were at some distance from the noisy spot where the various nymphs and tritons who had arrived from Paris by the last train were dabbling. Lower down, the banks of the island became silent and deserted, and the only persons Julien could see were an angler seated on a large stone, and a little farther off a couple of men, who were undressing, with the evident intention of bathing.

"You see those poplars?" said Fabrègue, pointing towards a clump of trees exactly opposite to them, but on the other side of the island.

"Yes," replied La Chanterie, rather absently.

"Well, it's just there that at daybreak to-morrow you will inflict a good sword thrust upon Monsieur Miraut, alias Saint Avertin."

"I'll do the best I can. Meanwhile I am going to try the water," said Julien, diving in a style which would have won the admiration of amateurs.

Fabrègue followed close upon him, and after the orthodox time under water, they both came to the surface; Fabrègue lower down the river and more in the centre, whilst Julien was nearer to the island. "Delicious!" shouted the ex-quarter-master, striking out.

Chanterie did not answer, for he was busy examining the two men whom he had seen undressing on the river bank, and who had now just entered the water a little distance lower down. One of them especially attracted his attention, for although his *capot* was turned towards Julien, the latter perceived that he wore a large pair of reddish whiskers. Really these intermittent apparitions savoured of nightmare, and Julien, to satisfy himself as to the identity of the person who wore these fin-like whiskers, resolutely struck towards their possessor.

The red-haired man swam with his back towards Julien, and swam like a fish, now on his side, now with only his forehead and nose out of water, and, whether by accident or intention, he never showed his face. His companion floated, and freely displayed a flatish insignificant countenance, which Julien did not remember having ever seen before. If the whiskers, now displayed in the river, were the same as those which he had seen in the station and, everything seemed to indicate that they did not belong to M. Wassmann, the latter must have something else to do that day than to swim about the Seine. At all events this was the opportunity or never for Julien to rid himself of all his haunting will-o'-the-wisp fancies, and he put on a spurt, so as to pass the person he was watching, and get a good direct look at his face. Just as he was about to come up with him, the man, still without turning round, suddenly dived, or rather let himself sink, under water with incredible vision and speed. Had he done it on purpose, and had he chosen the very instant in which he saw that he was about to be overtaken? This did not seem probable, as the other bather continued to float along quietly with the stream, without taking the least notice of the fact that a stranger was approaching.

"He will surely come up again presently," thought Julien.

Had he begun to swim only against the stream, so as to be near at hand, to get a good look at the face of the diver when the latter came to the surface.

He was ready with watchful eyes, like a harpooner watching for a whale to show itself, when suddenly he felt one of his legs seized hold of from below. He gave a vigorous kick to free himself, but the grasp was so sudden and very powerful that he could not loose it. He opened his mouth to call for help, but his head went down in the water before he could cry out. It seemed to him that an enormous weight hung from his ankles, and that an irresistible force was dragging him to the bottom of the river. He tried to struggle and to tread water with his feet, so as to give himself sufficient impetus to rise to the surface, but he did not succeed in doing so, and it seemed to him that his lower limbs were garroted. He even thought he felt a tight cordling across his knees, and realised that he was lost. The blood buzzed in his ears, an iron hand pressed upon his temples, his chest swelled as he begged for breath, and red flames hovered before his eyes. However, he was quite conscious; his mind had even acquired extraordinary clearness of perception, and in the space of a few seconds all the events of his life passed before his mental vision, to disappear again with the same rapidity. It was like a succession of lightning flashes on his brain. He once more beheld Wassmann's odious countenance, M. Jean's venerable features, and Prichet's sweet face. Then all became dark, and he ceased to think. His sensation was that of a violent blow on the shoulders. He stretched out his hands, grasped mechanically at some object within his reach, and clung on to it with the energetic instinct of a drowning man. Then everything vanished from his mind; he had no impression of what happened afterwards.

It was not till an hour later that he recovered from his utter prostration, and when he regained consciousness he found himself comfortably installed in one of Cabassut's beds. Fabrègue and Du Tremblay were near him watching his return to life, and they had prepared various strengthening beverages for him. A large tumbler of hot wine and water and a huge bowl of broth steamed away on the mantelshelf. Julien's eyes fell upon various articles strewn about the room—articles which had evidently come from some box of appliances for the rescue of the drowned—rubbers, blankets, bottles of smelling-salts, half-burnt feathers, and so on, the sight of which reminded him in some degree of what had befallen him.

"Thank you, my friends," he said, in a weak voice. "So you have saved me——"

"Aha!" exclaimed Fabrègue; "so you are really alive. Do you know for the last twenty minutes we have heard you breathing as regularly as a child in its first sleep, and we dared not wake you up. But, as to thanks, you don't owe us any; they are due to old Cabassut, who lent us all these drugs and paraphernalia; and, besides, you really saved yourself."

"I still have only a very confused recollection of what happened," murmured Julien. "What did really occur to me?"

"Well, you happened to clutch hold of the root of an old willow tree, and you grasped it firmly, probably without knowing what you were doing; however, most miraculously you kept your head above water until I reached you, and I can assure you I had a hard job to make you relinquish your hold on the root; you held it as if you wished to tear it up. It was a good sign anyhow, and I knew directly that you had only fainted, for your heart was still beating—not very strongly certainly; still it was beating."

"How can I have nearly drowned myself like that?"

"As to that, dence t ke me if I can tell, for you swim like a fish, and I can't make out your accident at all; I did not see it happen even; it was Du Tremblay who shouted out to warn me, and without him, upon my word!——"

"You will remember that I had remained in the boat," said Du Tremblay, continuing the explanation. "Fabrègue had shot away into mid stream, and you were going towards the island; I wondered if you meant to land, so I kept an eye on you, which was very lucky, for you suddenly disappeared like a bullet thrown into water. I at first thought you were amusing yourself by diving down and letting yourself drift, but when I saw that you didn't come up again I grew anxious; I pulled a stroke to larboard, and shouted to Fabrègue."

"And you may guess, my dear fellow, that I came along at double quick," said the Southerner. "We had as bad a ten minutes of it as you can fancy. You still didn't come up; I dived three times without finding you, and at last I began to fear that I should never see you again alive; however, at the moment when I was going to hunt for you along the bank, and Du Tremblay was drawing off his boots to spring into the water, what should I see, twenty yards below the place we had reached, but a hand clutching hold of an old stump, and some hair floating round a pale, or rather a green, face——"

"Then," said Du Tremblay, continuing the narrative, "we came up with you together, Fabrègue swimming, and I rowing; we got your hands off the tree, laid you down in the boat, and began to rub and pinch you——"

"And you'd never believe it, my dear Julien," interrupted Fabrègue, "there were two fellows—tradesmen, I fancy—bathing close to you, and they had certainly seen you sink, but instead of helping you they hastened away like a pair of ducks."

"Two tradesmen?" echoed the rescued man, raising himself in bed. "Ah! I had forgotten that scoundrel! It was he! It was Wassmann who——" Julien did not finish his sentence. His two friends looked at him with misgiving, and he suddenly remembered that neither of them were aware of the fight he was carrying on with the red-whiskered man. It was not a little time for enlightening them on the subject, and he had the sense to hold his tongue.

"Do you happen to know one of them?" asked Fabrègue.

"No——"

"Oh! I should not compliment you on your acquaintances. It was in vain that I appealed to the sailors; I could not get them to lend a hand! What fools! and I'll take my revenge. I saw you struggling in the water long before I did, and yet they would have let you to drown. The louder I shouted the faster they ran. It was a most ridiculous. They were in such a hurry to escape that they forgot to soap to dress, but fled across the island with their clothes under their arms."

"And you did not pursue them?" asked Julien, whom the account revived amazingly.

"Come here, then. We had something else to do than to chase such scamps as they were. Why, just think, we couldn't as yet tell whether you would be reliable, so I contented myself with treating them to some language they fully deserved. And don't alarm yourself, if I ever come across them——"

"Would you know them again?"

"I could not help recognizing him; and yet I can't help fancying that I should recognize the other. There was one especially, with red whiskers——"

"Perhaps he is still on the island," said Julien, jumping out of bed.

"Have you any intention of treating him up in your present condition? You are out of your wits again, I am glad to say; but no nonsense, please. You had to be well wadded by a good dinner instead of rowing a cowardly imbecile, and then you've had plenty of quarrels to attend to as it is. You haven't time to go to the *Sau-Avent*, and it's not worth while having another on hand."

"I can't resist fighting to-morrow," exclaimed La Chanterie.

"That is the way of it!" echoed Fabrègue. "What a mad fellow you are! My dove, you misst your vocation, and instead of choosing the legal profession, you ought to have enlisted in the Zouaves."

"Perhaps I should come to that," muttered Julien, who did not augur well of the war. And he added in a louder tone, "Well! have you fellows any idea to how I let myself sink under water so absurdly?"

"I thought you had the cramp," said Du Tremblay.

"I thought so too," added Fabrègue.

Julien did not answer. He was reflecting: "It was Wassmann swimming in front of me; it was Wassmann who dived, and caught hold of my legs; he wanted to do so, to prevent my making use of the letter which he could not steal from me. It is time to finish matters with that man."

"It was cramp; I'm sure of it," continued Fabrègue, "and you are not the first to have been drowned like that. It's no use being a first-rate swimmer; fellow can't be sure of avoiding such accidents. You've got over it, fortunately, so 'till's for the best.' Look sharp and dress, and then we'll go and see him."

It was, in fact, high time for Julien to dress, for he was merely wrapped up in the blankets in which his friends had rolled him, after an energetic rubbing. It was clear and evident that these effects had produced such good results so

speedily, and Julien's recovery really did them great honour. Without the help of any doctor, who could not, moreover, have been fetched in time to be of use, on account of the distance from the village, and with the sole help of the box of appliances which old Cabassut, the provident inn-keeper, kept on hand, Fabrique and Du Tremblay had done as much as the most skilful practitioner could have accomplished. Thanks to them, Le Chanterie, two hours after his accident, was so well set on his legs that he hardly felt any ill effects from his perilous adventure. At last, after a fit of insensibility leaves no more unpleasant traces than a violent headache, and this slight inconvenience was more than compensated in Julien's case, by a really fiercish appetite. He was fully restored to strength, and was quite disposed to cross swords on the following morning. He felt that he should be all right after a few hours' good sleep.

However, his return to consciousness brought with it a revival of his old forebodings; and nothing could shake his conviction that M. Wassmann had relentlessly pursued him during the last forty-eight hours. As it has been stated already, he even went so far as to suspect that Saint-Averin had been subsidised by this miserable forger to kill him in a duel. Accordingly, while he was dressing and while his friends were trying to amuse him by their mirth, he swore to himself, first, that he would not go to bed before writing to the priest of Charly to beg of him to hand the investigating magistrate the letter he had entrusted to him, explaining in what its importance consisted; and secondly, that he would himself inform the magistrate of all the incidents that had occurred within the last few days. By this course every eventuality would be foreseen. If he escaped unhurt from his brush with M. Miraut, he would personally renew his combat with this odious German; and if, on the contrary, he was killed or received a wound likely to endanger his life, M. Jean would be amply substituted to see the matter well through. He did not doubt but what the worthy priest would make every effort to discover the real culprit, and save the teacher. Having once formed these resolutions, La Chanterie felt quite disposed to regale himself with the good dinner which Cabassut had provided; and a very merry meal it was. Fabrique and Du Tremblay plied their work and their wit simultaneously. They were delighted to see a comrade to whom they were so sincerely attached in such a good way to recovery, when but a little while before they had thought that it was all over with him. It is necessary to add that they had not the least idea of such real or imaginary dangers as threatened Julien, and they had no anxiety as to the emergency on the morrow, for they felt perfectly sure that their friend would easily run the little dandy the gamut. So they enjoyed the repast by varied discussions and amusing stories.

Fabrique again related the story of the men who had fled naked across the island, and gave a lively description of the commotion their appearance must have caused among the ladies residing in the neighbouring wood. Du Tremblay discussed the angle, who had witnessed Julien's drowning, and who would certainly have tried to save him, if he had not had a bite at the very moment when he was about to spring into the water. The poor fellow had found himself between two stools—on one side his sentiments of humanity, and on the other his passion for fishing, and so he had stood motionless, his heart melting with compassion, but his eyes obstinately fixed on his float, which was dancing a saraband up and down in the wildest possible manner!

Julien could not help laughing over the grotesque perplexity of this disciple of the gentle craft, whom he remembered having once seated on a stone at the margin of the stream; however, he greatly regretted that his friends had not questioned him. If they had only known his name and abode, perhaps he could

been found, and some information might have been obtained from him respecting the two runaway brothers, for after all, it was quite possible that he knew them. However, as matters stood, La Grenouillère considered that he had better keep these thoughts to himself, and after the coffee and orthodox prayers, he returned to his room to write and go to bed early.

Having passed a note for M. Jean, which did not take him many minutes, he began to compose a letter to his uncle, which occupied him not much longer. In reality it was meant for his cousin, to whom he wished to bid good-bye in case the duel had a fatal result for himself; and as he did not dare to direct to her, he wished to express himself to M. de Braumes in such a way that Gabrielle should understand that his last thoughts had been of her. The composing of this epistle exceedingly embarrassed him somewhat, and he covered his paper with erasures before the fine expressions which would satisfy him. However he at last succeeded in his task; and he this letter, in which Gabrielle then counted very warmly on his fatherly kindness, and pressed his love and sincere affection for all his relations, he annexed a will, by the terms of which he appointed M. de La Grenouillère, M. de de Braumes his residuary legatee.

Having thus set his heart at ease, he went to bed, and he thought that after such a day's work, he had a right to do so, and therefore went straight to bed. He slept as soundly as the great dunder did in the night before a battle, and, right till the morning could have been going on in common with the victory of R. Croix, he quite slept, between a danger just escaped, and in the morning, was fully aware that the young lawyer possessed an excellent character and constitution.

As daylight was just beginning to dawn, when his two friends knocked at his door, Julien was up, in a moment, and his eyes promptly opened, though still more obedient to his dress than usual, for he would not show M. de La Grenouillère that he was not a man to come himself readily any more on a duelling ground than in a drawing-room.

On Thursday and Friday he had also been careful to dress himself suitably to the occasion, and some would have guessed that these three grandly dressed gentlemen, who had been in Paris, in the latter morning from London. As soon as La Grenouillère had put on his waistcoat and breeches the next morning, he was surprised with great delight that he suffered no ill effects in consequence of his mental and physical exertions, when he had before him the day before. His breakfast had completely disappeared; his limbs called for nothing but washed syzygies and vapours; never, indeed, had he felt finer in his life than he felt. Old Chassat, when he saw him appear, with bright eyes, a fresh complexion, and a natural gaiety, was filled with astonishment. Throughout his long career as a duellist's friend, he had never yet met one stronger, more brave, and braver than by the sword, when he had so early suffered death by water.

The boat was ready, and as the day was too early even. Although he was only half-past four, Julien proposed that they should get out. He had to reach the city, and he proposed his proposed arrival. His second had no objection, and the others, after embarking they stepped on shore, and below the spot where the last of the La Grenouillères had so narrowly escaped drowning.

Thus far, the first boat was completely deserted. Not the least sign of a boat, not even a boat in sight; and as at this early hour, the ladies of the parks of the island and still in their first sleep, there was none of the merry babbling which usually reveals the proximity of La Grenouillère, so boating

parties. Julien gazed around for the angler, in the vague hope that he might have resumed his seat on the stone, with early daybreak; but the disciple of Izaak Walton, remembering, no doubt, that he had been interrupted there on the previous evening, in the pursuit of his favourite pastime, had not thought fit to put in an appearance.

The trio crossed the island, Du Tremblay carrying the swords, and Fabrègue showing the way. The appointed meeting place could not have been better chosen. It was a clearing of some little extent, surrounded by trees, which seemed to have grown there for the express purpose of hiding the combatants from prying eyes. There was plenty of room for fencing, enough shade so that the sun's rays would not prove an inconvenience, and not sufficient grass to make the soil slippery.

"What do you say to the meadow of my choice?" asked Fabrègue, with a self-satisfied air.

"That it suits me perfectly," answered La Chanterie. "But are you quite sure that M. Miraut will know where to find us?"

"Oh! the spot is known well enough, and all the watermen of Chatou could show him the way. Besides, as we shall see him arrive on the opposite bank, from where we now are, there is nothing to prevent our hailing him."

"You're quite sure that he will come to this side of the island?"

"Of course, for to reach the other side, the only boat that I know of is old Cabassut's, unless, indeed, our party of dandies push as far as Bougival."

"Whatever their line of route may be, they don't hurry themselves, for five o'clock is just about to strike," said Du Tremblay.

"Supposing the rogue didn't come after all!" muttered Julien, whom the least incident threw into an appalling state of doubt.

"Oh, he'll come, sure enough," said Fabrègue, "for he considers himself a first-rate fencer; and, besides, he, perhaps, fancies that as you are an advocate, you have never held a sword. If he knew, however, what a clever swordsman you really are, I wouldn't answer for his coming up to the scratch."

"After all, he is not yet late," added Du Tremblay.

"And as we have plenty of time," continued the ex-quartermaster, "we will lie down on the turf, and smoke one or two cigars, pending these gentlemen's arrival."

Julien had no objection to offer to this plan. He sat down at the foot of a tall poplar, and dreamily gazed at the scenery before him, which was very unlike the landscape visible from old Cabassut's windows.

The right bank of the Seine, below the two bridges of Chatou, is bordered by high terraces, behind which rise several coquettish-looking villas, some three or four of which might pass for châteaux. Their pseudo-Babylonian style of architecture does not produce a disagreeable effect, but there is nothing particularly rural about it. On this side of the river more walls are to be seen than trees, and more stones than grass. On the island, on the other hand, vegetation is luxuriant, and the grass grows thick, perhaps because it is less often trodden under foot by excursionists from Paris. The feet of Parisian belles are specially adapted to walking on asphalt, and the heels of their tiny boots scrunch up the wild daisies in the fields.

The morning was delightful; the sun, which had just risen, gilded the rugged trunks of the poplar trees, and lent a silvery sheen to the drops of dew hanging from the tips of the leaves. You could hear the birds warbling among the lofty branches, and the gurgling of the water, which the morning breeze lapped gently against the pebbles on the shore. Looking on so peaceful and refreshing a picture, Julien momentarily forgot that he had come here to fight a

l with a fool; and his fancy wandered him to another water-side scene, that which had presented itself when a mere chance, which he now bitterly regretted, had brought him face to face with the preacher Robert. Since that unhappy meeting, as he was obliged to confess, his life had been entirely changing. He who previously passed as a perfectly happy man had been mixed up in the most disagreeable adventures. His hitherto uneventful existence had come suddenly to an end, and he had abruptly passed from a life of perfect peace to one of turbulent agitation. He now walked through life in the midst of snares. People forced his furniture, tried to rob him, and drown him; he could no longer move a step without being involved in a quarrel, or fight in some town. He was reduced to perpetual ruminations on dark plots, and had to wear out both mind and body in inventing defensive precautions. For a man accustomed to live openly and carry his head erect this was most painful torture. Even his love affairs with his cousin suffered by all this trouble. Prior to the gamekeeper's murder, Julien had quietly allowed himself to fall in love with Gabrielle; he had felt pretty sure that she loved him in return, and he did not see any great obstacle to their future marriage. The fact that had killed poor Michel, breasting on this delightful dream of happiness a thunder-bolt in a cloudless sky—that terrible shot had been the signal for a tempest to rise in the heart of Mademoiselle de Prières. The gentle, timid young girl, so recently freed from the restraint of convent life, had suddenly given way to romantic ideas, and her head had become filled with fancies of captives released from their persecutors, and similar chivalric deeds of gallant knights. She had imposed on her faithful cavalier a most perilous task, and had subjected his valour to the most desperate trials.

But Julien did not shrink from the disagreeableness or the dangers of the struggle, but as he was endowed with great tact and a keen sense of the fitness of things in general, he began to see the absurd side of the enterprise in which he had engaged, solely to please Gabrielle. This Quixotic behaviour in furtherance of so vulgar a cause seemed really a little ludicrous, and, in fact, it is not the duty of a well-bred man to sacrifice his peace of mind and body so to prove the unquestionable innocence of a poacher, who was not only accused of this one crime, but had undoubtedly been guilty of several other misdeeds. Mademoiselle de Prières had always lived among a set of people who greatly dislike being mixed up in criminal trials, or to play the part of heroes of romance; he preferred it as if he had seen what committed himself by intruding in such egotistic conduct.

Why was it that these sensible but refrigerating ideas troubled him now for the first time, on the island of Croissy, at the very moment when he was about to crown his series of strange adventures by a desperate duel? It was certainly not because he was afraid; only might bring counsel, and the instutinal homage of a more favourable view of his actions. He was roused, however, from his reverie by Fabrègue saying:

"I hear bells jangling in the direction of Chateau; our men are coming."

"And there is the boat from La Grimaillière crossing the stream to fetch them," added Du Tremblay.

"Let us rise up to receive them," said Julien, blithely. "We must do all honour to the noble lord of Saint-Avertin."

"You must also think of all you want us to do: have you any orders to give?" answered the ex-quartermaster.

"Only one. If any misfortune befalls me, I beg one of you to start at once for Chailly, and deliver these two letters, one to my uncle, the other to the priest of the village, whose name is Monsieur Jean."

"All right!" answered Fabrègue. "Du Tremblay will see to it; he has a greater vocation than I have for diplomatic service; but I sincerely hope that there will be no cause for conveying your correspondence to its destination. If you are only careful you won't get a scratch, and you will give Miraut a good lesson."

"I hope so too, but it is always prudent to put one's affairs in order."

"By the bye, are you very anxious to kill Miraut?"

"Certainly not; I have enough worry just now without wanting to burden my conscience with manslaughter."

"And besides, that always creates a lot of bother. The law takes the matter up, and to avoid detention in prison, a fellow has to rush off to Belgium! Just give our dandy a little scratch on the arm or shoulder; that will be enough to teach him politeness."

"I will try to do so, but you know as well as I do that on the duelling ground it is impossible always to do as you like."

"No doubt it is; only remember what I told you about his little game. He fences well, is on the watch for low extrications and sezoon feints, but his parades are weak, and he lacks alacrity in the parry and thrust. Attack him boldly, press him so as to make him retreat, and don't spare straight thrusts. I know these grand gymnasium fencers well; when this fellow once sees the point of a sword within six inches of his eye he won't feel so easy."

"Here they are," interrupted Du Tremblay.

In fact, a carriage drawn by four post horses, two of which were ridden by postillions, was now seen approaching the river's bank, creating a great noise. Fabrègue's predictions were being realised. It would have been difficult to imagine a more noisy arrival. The horses neighed, their bells tinkled, the whips of the postillions cracked, and it would not have taken much for the very gentlemen, lounging on the carriage seats, to applaud themselves. All this showed deplorable want of taste, and was quite worthy of the fool who had renounced his father's name, to cut a figure as a nobleman among women of equivocal reputation. The grotesque hubbub had fortunately not attracted anyone's attention, for the Paris cits who spend the summer at Chatou are not particularly partial to seeing the sun rise. M. de Saint-Avertin and his seconds alighted from their carriage with the easy nonchalance of men who had spent a jovial night, and embarked in the boat waiting for them, accompanied by a servant in a showy livery, who carried an oblong parcel in his hand.

"They bring their own swords," said Du Tremblay. "You know it is agreed that we shall draw lots as to whose weapons are to be used."

Julien made a gesture of indifference, and threw away his cigar, so as to meet his opponent with the orthodox gravity of such occasions.

The arm of the Seine was not very wide, and Saint-Avertin, who had seen the three friends from afar, soon landed with his companions at the foot of the tall poplars. The dandy did not look at all afraid, though his eyes were sunken, and his face very flushed, but his two friends were not over steady on their legs. Moreover, they did not seem to have much experience in duelling matters, for they let Fabrègue direct all the preliminary business. A coin was tossed up, and chance favoured Julien as to the choice of swords. The servant was stationed beyond the clearing to signal, if need were, the approach of any interferer coming from another part of the island. The ferryman kept a look-out on the river in his boat, and each side being of opinion that all explanation was superfluous, all that remained was to commence the fight.

Fabrègue, in his capacity as an ex-quadrantmaster, was naturally directed to take the arrangement of affairs. He selected the ground, marked out the

ness, taking care that neither of the combatants should have the sun in his eyes, and measured the swords in presence of Miraut's seconds, who had formally resigned themselves to taking but a passive part in the business. They, however, tried to give themselves knowing airs, one of them by granting his approval after each operation, the other by giving vent now and again to short phrases of imaginary English. Fabrique looked at them askance more than once, and even openly shrugged his shoulders; but these gentlemen seemed quite determined not to lose their temper.

As to Saint-Arcadie, his attitude was sufficiently becoming. Leaning against the trunk of a poplar tree, with an utterly expressionless face, and his arms crossed over his chest, he awaited the termination of the preparations with an air of indifference which was certainly well assumed, if it was not real. It must be owned that Julien seemed much less calm. He stamped up and down with evident impatience, and he rubbed his hand across his forehead, as if to chase away some thought which worried him. Fabrique kept his eye on him, and as he knew him to be particularly plucky, he was much astonished to see no sign of weakness, or at any rate embarrassment. He ended, however, by attributing this resolution to anxiety to finish with it all, and he ended by making a hasty preliminary. The two opponents having been informed that the signal was given, stepped off their coats, whereupon the combat was about to begin. The two warriors had to cross swords and fight the English combatants, which to Fabrique's great stupefaction, Julien began to speak, instead of putting himself on guard.

"Stop!" he called out to his opponent, looking him steadily in the face, "before beginning I wish to ask you a question."

"What is it, sir?" said Saint-Arcadie, with an asked look and somewhat scornful look.

"He asked me," said the half-English, "if La Chastrie was about to propose an arrangement."

"What?" said Miraut, who had been standing by, and inquired of Julien, brusquely.

"What is it, sir?" said Saint-Arcadie, with an asked look and somewhat scornful look.

"Do you know him, yes or no?"

"He is a Frenchman," said Saint-Arcadie, "and your question, and do not consider yourself bound to answer it."

However, while M. Miraut thus spoke, he turned really pale, and though he tried to hide his emotion, it was evident that he could not conceal the fact that his question thrown at him in his teeth had greatly annoyed him. But there was someone else present who was even more amazed than he was, and this somebody, indeed, came to his aid. Fabrique had leapt with astonishment at the first words which Julien had said, and he could not understand how a fellow for whom he had so long acted as he would for him. He failed to observe one of the rules of the ceremony of duelling, which formally forbids any talking between the combatants when they are armed for the contest. He vainly tried to remember, as an old African soldier, any precedent for such an enormity, and, finding none, approached Julien and whispered to him: "What are you thinking of, do you? gossiping like that! You must not do that sort of thing, my dear fellow, you will have everyone laughing at us."

"I knew all that I wanted to know," said La Chastrie aloud. And he added, turning towards his adversary: "We are now ready."

Fabrique, delighted to see his friend remember himself, at once crossed the words, exclaiming,

"Right, gentlemen!"

Julien was the first to attack. He had the advantage of height over Miraut, who was hardly tall enough to serve in the infantry, and who besides did not appear very strong. The beat and thrust seemed to Julien to be the best lead, and, as his comrade, Fabrègue, had advised him, he commenced by four or five thrusts delivered with uncommon energy. They produced the result foretold by the ex-quartermaster, that is to say they compelled the little dandy to retreat, but they were parried with great skill. La Chanterie soon realised that if his opponent had no very brilliant execution, he fenced in a pretty safe style; his parry-and-thrust was always rather weak, but well judged, and, in fact, he might prove a formidable antagonist if time were given him. He evidently relied on tiring Julien out, while he himself remained on the defensive, leaving nothing to chance, and awaiting the moment when fatigue, or a false movement of his opponent, would afford an opportunity for some dangerous thrust, which he doubtless held in reserve, and which he meant to plan out during the earlier skirmishing.

It was the manœuvre of a skillful spallassin, and Julien, who at once guessed it, was careful to be on the watch. He increased the energy and precision of his attacks, delivering thrust after thrust, and charging with a fury which did not after all impair the correctness of his style. Fabrègue, who watched the contest with the eye of a connoisseur and the solicitude of a devoted friend, was simply transported with admiration. Du Tremblay, less enthusiastic, frowned slightly, and did not appear so sanguine as to the ultimate result. Saint-Avertin's two seconds, sobered by this exciting spectacle, were probably not very easy, for they constantly exchanged glances.

However, no advantage was discernible on either side. M. Miraut had retreated as far as he could, and was getting blown, but he still defended himself, and did not allow himself to be touched; La Chanterie still pressed him determinedly, although he began to feel tired. Fabrègue, as umpire, finally considered it was time to put an end to this bout, which had lasted much longer than usual. So he extended the cane with which he was provided as ensignia of his office, and the swords were at once lowered.

The opponents paused by the interruption to resume their places on the ground where the engagement had commenced, and while they rested for a few minutes, Du Tremblay, who was perfectly cool and composed, observed them closely, and he thought he discerned evil intentions in the cunning glance of Saint-Avertin. The latter had evidently kept his most dangerous thrusts for the end, and thought he would make short work of Julien. La Chanterie, however, far from appearing discouraged, showed a more animated face and sparkling eyes, foreboding a more terrible assault even than the last had been. The question was, would his strength belie him too soon, for Miraut would probably manœuvre with the same prudence as before, and retreat as far as possible. Fabrègue half regretted that he had suspended the contest, as, at the very moment when he had given the signal for a pause, the dandy had been driven back against a poplar tree, and consequently could no longer retreat, so that there had been a good chance of La Chanterie nailing him to the trunk. However, when a man has undertaken to act as umpire, he must show perfect equity, and Fabrègue was not a man to fail in loyalty, even in the interest of his best friend.

Wishing to repair as far as he could, whatever wrong he had done to Julien, he arranged that the rest should not be a long one. In a few appropriate words, he let both opponents understand that it was to their interest to proceed as quickly as possible to the second bout, and by mutual consent, after three minutes' interruption, they again placed themselves on guard. It was

evident that La Chauterie now meant to finish matters, for scarcely the swords crossed, than without amusing himself with extrications or parries, he cut M. Miraut's sword so violently that it broke in two. At the same time he lunged out and would certainly have transpierced his adversary, his thrust being a little higher and less swift. Unfortunately, the two thrusts were almost simultaneous, and his wrist came upon the broken blade remaining in his arm. The dandy had not failed to retreat afresh from his usual emotion, so that after this short and decisive bout, the two opponents found themselves some three feet distant from each other; Miraut, tramping a sword in his hand, and quite bewildered by the unexpected turn things had taken, and Julien, his arm pierced by a triangular blade, which protruded fully two inches.

For a moment there was general stupefaction. Then the pain made Julien drop his sword, and he staggered forward. Du Tremblay caught him in his arms, supported him, while Fabrègue drew the steel fragment from his wrist. It flowed abundantly but without any intermittent jets. By a miracle, the artery had not been severed. The exquart master then bound the arm firmly with his handkerchief to stop the bleeding, and he was cheering the mangled man with some kindly words, when M. de Saint-Avertin approached. His mouth quivered, and he uttered the word phrase, as follows:—
"I hope, gentlemen, that everything has occurred conformably with honour, that you are willing——"

He then turned to the devil, exclaiming, in a thundering voice, "M. de Saint-Avertin, consider him as good as dead, and made his bow without saying a word more. To see him sink away like this without flourish of arms or bow of drum, one could have sworn that he had just executed some difficult feat, and was delighted to have accomplished it so easily. His seconds, still in full, followed him with military precision—it was the only thing at all military about them—and the liveried servant, who had softly crept up to see the fighting, carried off his master's swords which were still stuck up, as no use had been made of them.

Fabrègue kept the blades going on their way without saying a word of all he had seen or felt. He was too uneasy as to La Chauterie's condition to stand still, and he hurried with Miraut, much as he would have liked to do so. And indeed, although so important an organ had been injured, Julien's wound might be followed by serious consequences. The flesh was very much torn in the part where several veins met, and with the July heat lockjaw was greatly to be dreaded. The blade having passed between the two bones of the forearm must have just shaved the radial artery, and from this there might arise other perils, momentarily suppressed by a clever ligature. In short, poor old Bundo was in a very bad way, and the result of this duel seemed to be a crowning complement of his many misadventures.

However, he bore his sufferings with great courage, and to see him walk off smiling on Du Tremblay's arm one would never have guessed that he had already been half-drowned on the previous evening.

The walk across the island was both slow and painful, and as the trio reached the boat which was to row them across to the *Protesane Gullycon*, they could hear the distant crack of the whips of the postillions who were celebrating in their own fashion Saint-Avertin's triumphant return. On the side of the vanquished the passage across the Seine was both sad and silent. Julien clenched his teeth and said nothing. Fabrègue and Du Tremblay only exchanged glances, judging that conversation by word of mouth would be

superfluous. Old Cabussut was the first to break the ice. He was standing on the bank, where, ever since their departure he had smoked pipes innumerable waiting to learn the result; and now, seeing his client come back with his arm to all appearance seriously injured he gave way to warm and loquacious expressions of sympathy, offering to fetch a surgeon from Bougival, to put his horse to, to take the wounded man back to Paris, or to apply an ointment of his own composition to the wound, which ointment, so he declared, had worked a wonderful cure on the shoulder of a journalist, who a short time previously had been wounded in a duel on the island.

Fabrigue put a stop to all this chatter by telling him pretty sharply to hold his tongue, and Julien declared that he simply wished to start for the station and catch the first train to Paris. He had but little confidence in the plasters of an innkeeper, or in the talent of suburban practitioners and he was desirous of reaching home and placing himself in the hands of his usual medical attendant.

This was evidently the right thing to do, and the proposal of an immediate start was in no wise opposed by his two friends. Du Tremblay undertook to settle the innkeeper's bill, whilst the wounded man, leaning on Fabrigue's arm, walked slowly towards the station. On arriving there, and while awaiting for the train to come up, the industrious Southerner found means of converting his necktie into a sling, which he tied round Julien's neck, so that he could rest his arm in it. He also procured a jug of cold water, so as to be able to bathe the wound during the journey, and, in fact, managed so well, that La Chanterie was almost as ably cared for as if he had taken the precaution to secure the attendance of the most skilful member of the faculty.

The energetic fellow was still sufficiently self-possessed, not to excite the curiosity of strangers, and the journey was accomplished without any one remarking the arm in the sling, and the perpetual bathing. It also chanced that after the first few moments, Julien was pretty free from pain. Not only did he bear without complaint the oscillation of the railway carriage, and the rough shaking each time that the train stopped, but he emerged little by little from the torpor that always follows upon a severe injury. At Nanterre he began to smile, and at Asnières he already jested on his want of skill. This gaiety assured well. He laughed at Du Tremblay, who had been at first seriously alarmed, and made Fabrigue talk more than ever.

"It will be nothing at all," exclaimed the Southerner; "I know your constitution well; you will get off with the bother of having your cravat tied by your servant, and of writing with your left hand, for a month or six weeks. However, how did you manage to get hurt like that just at the very moment when you were going to spit Saint-Avertin like a hawk?"

"I can't tell myself; I was irritated, and wanted to finish the business. I acted too hurriedly. Besides, I had no great inclination to kill the fellow. Perhaps I shall want him later on."

"What are you saying? You want a rogue like that? I hope neither you nor I ever will have anything to do with him; that is, unless I find the opportunity to give him the correction he so richly deserves. However, I fancy he'll keep out of my way. He must have been horribly afraid of you just now, for you led him a pretty dance, and he won't be in a hurry to begin again so soon; he is too much of a coward."

"All the same he's a very fair hand at fencing, and I don't think you did him justice when you told me yesterday that he didn't know how to parry."

"Pooh! he has keen eyes and a certain dexterity of wrist; but that's nothing when a fellow lacks pluck, and as a proof of it, if he had had more pluck, and not been afraid for his own skin, he would have pricked you two or three times."

"That's quite possible, for I wasn't my own master, and when once a fellow is angry he is off his guard."

"You were in a temper with you? There really was no reason for it, unless you were angry at the way he answered your question when you asked him if he knew a certain Monsieur Glouglou—Grasman— or some such name. And, by-the-by, why the deuce did you inquire of him about his acquaintances just as you were commencing the bout? You know as well as I do that it is against the rules."

"Yes, yes, I was in the wrong, but I had my reasons," said Le Grand-tail, in the tone of a man who is determined not to explain himself any further.

Whatever wish Fabreque might have to know the motive of his friend's voluntary inaction of the duelling code, he felt that this was not the moment to make it. So he said nothing more on the subject, and the conversation dropped. Then, moreover, was again in great pain, and it was time for the turn to stop. Outside the terminus Fabreque leapt into a cab to go and fetch a doctor, while Du Tremblay helped the injured man into another vehicle, and saw him home.

On reaching the door of the apartment in the Rue de Verneuil, great was the delectation of the surgeon to find his victim Laurent struggling with a woman dressed like a woman of the neighbourhood of Paris. This obstinate country-dancer had determined to enter the rooms to speak to the Countess, "to the Chevalier or Monsieur le Comte," and perceived that she was the bearer of a letter from Laurent. In vain had Laurent assured that his master was very busy to-day; she insisted that Pauline must deliver up her key, and that she wouldn't leave without executing her commission.

Just as arrived just in time to settle the difference. The woman recognised him and began to address him by name, and Julien, after some little hesitation, remembered that he had sometimes seen her at the Countess of Châteauneuil on previous occasions, when she had come to visit her cousin, the keeper Michel.

The messenger was, in fact, no other than Jacqueline Ledoux, and after exchanging a few words with the valet, who had cared to keep the wife of a Chauby (and who, as a councillor at the town, she drew from her basket a letter which Le Grand-tail had to open with his left hand. It was signed by M. Jean, and ran as follows:—"Sir,—If you can come to-morrow to Chauby, your presence will greatly save the course of the accused man in whom we are both so deeply interested, and I particularly desire to speak with you as soon as possible, spending a matter which has come to my knowledge. It is impossible for me to leave the persons to-day, and if you will kindly tell me with a stick you will be doing a good action, and at the same time bravely obliging your faithful servant."

On perusal of this letter of course M. Jean forgot that he was wounded and in great pain, and that Fabreque would soon arrive with a doctor to dress his arm.

"My dear fellow," he said to Du Tremblay, drawing him on one side, "I've received some news which obliges me to start at once for Chauby, and I beg of you—"

"Are you mad?" replied Du Tremblay, "or do you wish to lose your arm? To travel any further by rail, in your present condition, would be attended by very great risk indeed."

"I think you exaggerate, but even if I thought that I was risking my life, I should go all the same."

"What in the world has happened at Charly then? Has your uncle had a seizure? or has Mademoiselle de Brannes suddenly fallen ill?"

"Nothing of that sort, I am glad to say, but, nevertheless, I must go."

"Confound it! At any rate wait till *l'alègue* brings the doctor to examine your wound, and see if no hemorrhage is to be feared. He will bandage it up properly for you, so that you can travel without fear of accident, since you are mad enough to set off, instead of going to bed."

"There is a first-rate doctor at Charly. I will call him in and he will dress my wound splendidly."

"And suppose you bleed to death in the train? It will be pleasant for your uncle and charming cousin if you are carried dead or unconscious to the Château of Chasseneuil."

This argument seemed to make some impression upon Julien, and for a moment he seemed to hesitate. But he soon continued in a resolute tone.

"No, no, I shan't die, I'm sure of it. And it's almost better for me to make the journey before my wound has had time to get inflamed; if I defer the matter, I shall perhaps be obliged to stay here. Laurent," he added to his servant, "go and see if the cab which brought us is still outside, and tell the driver to wait for us."

"I suppose, sir," said Jacqueline Ledoux, "that I can go away now as I have performed my commission?"

"Yes, and I am much obliged for your bringing me the letter so expeditiously."

"Oh, there was no fear of my dawdling on the way; his reverence bade me come straight here, and he is such a worthy man that I shouldn't have heart to trifle with his instructions. Would you believe it, sir, he has begun to give Marcel lessons——"

"Who is Marcel?"

"A child from the Foundling Hospital, whom we took to our own home——"

"And whom M. Wassmann almost ran over on the Place de la Bastille. I remember the story now; it happened on the very day when poor Michel——"

"Ah! don't mention it! When I think that if it hadn't been for that unlucky business, I should never have missed the train, and should have had time to show Michel the writing I had received by post, I can never forgive myself."

"You have never found out where the letter came from?" asked Julien, excitedly.

"No, upon my word, no; and I have not even the least idea. My man said it might be that the letter was written by a street walker, some sweet-heart of that ruffian Robert's, and that is quite likely too, for the postman remembers that there was the Paris post-mark on the envelope which I was silly enough to lose."

"Your husband is wrong in his opinion, my good woman; but just tell me, don't you live close to a café kept by a Mademoiselle Rose?"

"My neighbour, sir; she is a most deserving person, most tender-hearted, I assure you! She is so soft-hearted, indeed, that the least thing gives her a turn. Just fancy that on the evening when Michel was killed, she was very nearly taken ill over it, and since she had to attend before the magistrate she has had several nervous attacks, and is wasting away to such an extent that she looks as thin as an old vine prop."

Julien's eyes sparkled. He was thinking to himself: "Supposing it were possible for having committed perjury!" And he determined to inquire of M. Jean concerning the conduct of the landlady of the Café du Grand-Ingénieur.

"Upon my soul, I think he must have lost his wits," muttered Du Tremblay to himself, as he stood at hearing Julien start away to an old man, instead of thinking of his wound, which must be causing him awful pain.

"Just then Laurent came back to say that the cab was at the door. "If you could only wait ten minutes," observed Du Tremblay, "Fabrègue will be back, and you could get the doctor to look at you before you leave." "No, no; I shall miss no train, and that would delay me another hour," claimed La Chanterie. "I am off now."

"At any rate, let me go with you; you might come to grief on the way, or have a fall, or fit, and it is indispensable that you should have someone to attend to you."

"No, thank you. Excuse my saying this. But I must really go quite alone. Charly and you would only be in my way."

"All right," muttered Du Tremblay, rather irritated. "I will stay here to wait for you. Do me the kindness to take the letters you entrusted me with. I am delighted not to have to deliver them."

Julien, ashamed that he was forced to repay his friend's devotion so ill, and not knowing quite what to say, took the two letters, compiled the previous evening, from Du Tremblay's hands and followed the old woman Ledoux, who had now reached the door.

"Shall you come back to-night?" shouted his friend.

"Yes, unless I am kept at my uncle's house," replied Julien as he rapidly crossed the court-yard.

Du Tremblay was quite right: this expedition was a mad one under the circumstances, and La Chanterie knew it well. But his excitement precluded other thoughts and urged him on to insane conduct. M. Jean's letter had worked up his imagination, and he imagined at first that the worthy priest must be awaiting him with full proofs of M. Wassmann's rascality. His hope agreed so well with the schemes he had formed during the last forty-eight hours, that he was anxious to verify it. He set out with a fixed determination to tell the priest all about the two attempts at theft—one at his house, the other on his person, together with the downing scheme, and to beg his assistance in bringing these matters before the investigating magistracy. He considered that the magistrate would not refuse him this, to issue a warrant for the arrest of the abominable plotter of so many criminal acts.

This thought helped him to endure the fatigue of the journey, but did not prevent him from feeling frightful pain. His wrist swelled considerably on the way, and the swelling reached the hand, the skin of which turned livid. At last he suffered such frightful agony, that he needed superhuman courage and unheard-of efforts to prevent himself from fainting. When the train drew up at the Charly railway station, Julien's strength was quite exhausted, and he had to go some distance on foot, as the parsonage was situated at the other end of the village. He summoned all his courage, and quickly walked out of the station, to avoid any explanation with the railway officials who knew him, and who would not have failed to ask him, why he wore his arm in a sling, and was in such a desperate hurry to get on.

To the pain he suffered was added the fear that he might meet someone

belonging to the château on the way; and this would have greatly bothered him, for he wished to tell his uncle privately about the circumstances of the duel, and he particularly desired to avoid frightening Gabrielle. However, chance favoured him; he traversed Charly from one end to the other without being obliged to answer any indiscreet question. The only person he recognised was Dignonard, standing on the threshold of his shop, with the most majestic expression of countenance. As a matter of course the independent-minded chemist took good care not to bow to M. de Brannes's nephew; his red cap, embroidered by Madame Dignonard's lovely finger, was not raised from his pointed skull. However, he carefully watched Julien for a long way down the street, and the young fellow realised, that ten minutes later every inhabitant of Charly would be made acquainted with his arrival, and the unusual manner in which he carried his right hand.

This was an additional reason for hurrying on to the parsonage. Julien made a last effort, and finally arrived at his destination. He found the door wide open, for the good priest's house was, like his heart, always accessible to those who stood in need of it. Julien went down a passage and reached the garden, where he espied M. Jean walking along reading his breviary. The priest on seeing his visitor, hurriedly shut his book, and came towards him with open arms. "Ah! sir," he exclaimed, "how much I thank you for coming, and how greatly astonished you will be when I show you the singular discovery which has been made in the Bêlière woods."

"A discovery in the Bêlière woods!" exclaimed Julien.

"Yes, yes, you shall see it in a moment; you will be very much surprised," said M. Jean. "But what is amiss with you? Ah! good heavens! your hand enveloped in bandages, and your arm in a sling—you are wounded?"

"Slightly—I hope so at least—you were saying that this discovery——"

"I will show it to you directly; just now you must rest yourself, my dear child; you are almost fainting; in heaven's name! what has happened to you?"

While thus speaking the good priest pushed forward a garden chair, on which he made M. de la Chanterie seat himself. The young fellow really had the greatest need of care and rest. "Thank you, your reverence, it's really nothing," he murmured.

"And to think that Geneviève is not at home to go and fetch Dr. Minard!" said M. Jean, softly, on seeing Julien close his eyes and sink back in the chair.

Fortunately, the worthy priest was accustomed to tend the ills of the body as well as those of the soul, and he knew exactly what to do to prevent a fainting fit. He hastened to his study, on the ground floor of the parsonage, took up a little medicine chest, which he kept in reserve for occasions of this kind, and promptly returned to the invalid. His old servant, Geneviève, who had gone marketing, returned at that very moment, and he met her in the passage. "The doctor!" he called out to her; "go at once and fetch the doctor, and bring him back here with you. If he has gone out look for him in the village, find him, and tell him to come here without losing an instant."

Whilst Geneviève put down her basket and rushed quite scared into the street, M. Jean made Julien inhale some smelling salts, and the young advocate soon began to rally. Then, without waiting for him to regain consciousness entirely, the curé carefully unfastened the hastily arranged bandage round his wrist. There could be no mistake as to the nature of the wound. The point of a

thing, so that he could have thus pierced the flesh in two distinct places, and produced those triangular apertures.

"A du! !!" sighed M. Jean; "those young men are all lunatics. This is not society—socialism leads to it! Who would have believed it of this young man, he looks so gentle and so good!" The young man then examined the wound carefully and did not like the look of it. The triangular flesh had assumed a hot tint, and a kind of blood, frothy and rose-coloured, oozed from the two openings. The wound inflicted by M. de Saint-Aventin's sword. M. Jean bathed the cut with cold water, and re-bandaged it gently with fine linen compressed in ammonia; and then he made his patient drink a few drops of *Eau de Vie de St. Germain*. This capital medicine would work wonders, and Julien dropped his eyes, so much as came to his face and he sat up again in the chair.

"You feel better?" asked M. Jean.

"Yes, yes, I feel better now; it was only a little weakness, occasioned by over-exercise," stammered the injured man.

"And by a sword-cut," added the priest. "Ah! it is very wrong of you to have neglected that God-father was trying to take our neighbour's life."

"But, father, I have been fighting, but I swear that I did not try to kill the other; what he has done to me is the cutting of an ear; and a downright rogue, a thorough scoundrel insulted me."

"Hush! hush! or he will say it is another deadly sin; and, besides, you must apologise to him in your own good time; Doctor Bertrand, when I have got for, will tell you so presently, I'm sure of it."

"I shall be very glad to do so, father," said Julien meekly; "but pending his arrival, couldn't you tell me——"

"Why I cannot tell you to come to the doctor immediately, and that he should examine your wound, and, had I known that you were wounded, I should have left everything here and have set off for Paris. But I had seen you yesterday, when you entrusted me with the sealed package, and I had no cause to imagine when did this duel take place?"

"This morning at five o'clock."

"And you let me go without taking the time to have your wound properly dressed? It is here, father, and you must not regret your own foolishness; ought to have reflected before sending you the letter."

"You could not guess that I had been fighting a duel," said La Fontaine, smiling. "And I swear you have rendered me the greatest service, for the terms of your letter leave me no doubt but what you have learnt something in the publisher's labour; indeed, at the moment when I so foolishly let you suppose you were telling me of a discovery; if it could only help me to unmask that villain named Wassermann——"

"Gently, my dear child, I beg of you. It is enough to hear you give way to sentiments of hatred, even against this foreigner."

"But you are ignorant of all that has happened; you are not aware that during the last three days this man has organised a most infernal conspiracy against me, that it was he who got hold of a fellow well skilled in fencing, to try and kill me; that he has not only tried to drown me, but has paid others to break into my house; you are not aware that I intend to call, to-day, on the magistrate to denounce Monsieur Wassmann to him afresh, and I hope that the magistrate won't hesitate about having him arrested. He will be the more disposed to seize this German, as you will accompany me to his

chambers, I'm sure, to show him the proof which Providence has placed in your hands."

"The proof! You no doubt allude to the affair which my letter referred to; but, my dear child, I did not speak of a proof, and above all I did not tell you that the discovery in any way established Monsieur Wassmann's guilt."

"What! it's not a proof against him that—I must have been strangely mistaken then as to the sense of the letter which Madame Ledoux brought me. You spoke of my assisting the unhappy family which we are interested in, of doing a good action——"

"Search for truth is always praiseworthy, and I applied for your help to enable me to discover the real facts."

"It is entirely at your service, your reverence; but I beg of you to tell me what has happened."

"I should prefer to await the doctor's permission for doing so. In your condition you require rest and quiet: the least emotion might aggravate your sufferings, and, besides, you seem to me scarcely disposed to listen calmly to anything connected with poor Michel's murder."

"I will be quite calm, I give you my word of honour for it. And you can see, too, that your kind care has quite restored me, that I am fully self-possessed and have recovered all my strength."

This was boasting on M. de la Chanterie's part, especially inasmuch as his strength was concerned, for he tried to rise from his chair and could hardly succeed in doing so. The priest gently obliged him to resume his seat; and then, having doubtless reflected that by refusing to gratify his curiosity he might only excite him more, he said with a kind smile: "I yield to your reasoning, my son, and the story I am about to tell you will, I trust, help you to wait patiently for M. Minard's arrival. Remember you have just promised me to remain calm."

"And I still promise it, your reverence."

"Very well then; you must know that we are indebted for the discovery which I wrote to you about to a poor child of whom you must often have heard me speak, Marcel——"

"The lad whom Madame Ledoux brought here, and whom that fellow Wassmann——"

"Exactly," answered M. Jean, who seemed anxious to curtail all recriminations against his neighbour at the Pavillon des Sorbiers. "I must tell you that I have partly undertaken the education of this little fellow, and I soon realised that he had not only a good heart, but also rare intelligence. He learns with incredible facility, and I am certain that Providence, which has so richly endowed him, will help me to make a man out of him."

"And he has found——"

"I am coming to it. His master, old Ledoux, allows him to come to the parsonage early every morning for me to teach him, and the child never fails to do so, as he is fond of learning. Only he sometimes tumbles on the way. At his age one can understand it. Well, this morning, instead of following the high road, he came round by the Maine, and to reach the parsonage he had to cross the Bélière woods. Was it chance or the natural curiosity of children that led him to the spot where the unlucky keeper was killed? I hardly know. Anyhow, while he was amusing himself rummaging among the trees and bushes, he found on the ground a piece of paper rolled into a pellet——"

"A gun wad!" exclaimed Julien, whose heart beat with joy and hope. Every thing makes me fancy that this paper did serve as a gun wad, as you say, and what is really surprising is that the same thing occurred to me; so I must have known the paper away, as many children would have done, and I told you and called my note to the fact that there was some handwriting on it."

Writing?—What?—You said I was, with intense emotion;—it is the first wad—it is the other half of the torn letter."

"The second wad? the other half of the torn letter!" answered the curé, with an astonished look. "What do you mean, my son?"

"It's quite true. You know, I did not tell you when I gave you the paper, that I will explain to you; in a word, I beg of you. You are saying that this little paper had in it only a paper rolled up in a pellet, that on this paper there was some handwriting?"

"Yes, and I own that the discovery surprised me greatly at first. I remember that at the time of the search following upon the murder, the gendarmes had found out if it was in Bêlére woods, and that directly there was considered some evidence against Robert."

"Yes, indeed; and he has certainly been accused with it. Ah, well! the search was made on this point as on all the others. The murderer, I see, took the precaution to wipe away the words from his gun before firing. It was not the powder who found the handkerchief as he was in ambush when the soldiers were looking for the powder, as the powder itself states. In that case, how could he have had time to remove the wad?"

"The wad?—How could he do that? and when I saw some writing on the unfolded paper, I finally believed that I possessed an explanation of the mystery."

"Well?"

"When the writing on the paper is not a totally enlightened one, for the lines are imperfect."

"That's it: it's the second half!"

"Imperfect, and even burnt in some places."

"I'm sorry; it was the bad will of the powder from the shot in the murderer's gun. He did not think it necessary to remove it, imagining that it would not be as good as he pulled the trigger. As for the powder, when the soldiers were looking for the shot, he extracted it, thinking that it might be found intact."

"I do not know if your guess is a correct one," said the priest, who did not think of the fact of M. de la Chantier's deductions, as he was unaware of the story;—"but I know that if the murderer reckoned as you say, he was not mistaken, for the writing, with a few lines here and there, is still quite legible."

"And to prove Robert's innocence, does it not?" asked Julien, whose face was up with joy and hope.

"Alas! not as clearly as I could wish. I have read these imperfect lines over and over again, and I confess that they do not tell one much."

"I will undertake to complete them and show their exact sense."

"It was with the idea of your helping me to do so that I begged of you to come here, but I doubt if your being more successful than myself."

"I am certain that I shall be successful, you reverence, as soon as you have shown me the paper."

"Here it is," said M. Jean, opening his book; "I put it between the leaves of my breviary to smooth it out."

Julien took hold of the fragment and saw that the imperfect lines ran as follows :—

follow thee, I
 prove to thee
 all kinds of
 of a false
 troubling thee
 has its limits
 to commit
 an infamy to
 that young man that I
 when I
 not to thyself
 thou dost not
 if thou
 ce
 and to
 there are
 est
 may have seen thee
 friend
 design. Thou wilt again
 In conclusion I
 promise me that thou wilt
 thou wouldst, friend
 speak one word

This was all, and certainly these disconnected words could have told M. Jean very little. But Julien had recognized the writing at the first glance, and had no doubt but what he now held the other fragment of the letter, part of which he had found a fortnight previously. This new fragment was much narrower than the first one, and consequently less clear, for it only contained the fag ends of sentences, and even here and there but half words and syllables. On the left side, moreover, the powder had burnt the paper, so that there would be some gaps when the two pieces were laid side by side; however, Julien fully expected to ascertain something of their purport by combining them.

"Well! what do you make of these hieroglyphics?" the curé asked him. "I am sure that you believe the secret to be hid den in this document, and that you think, like I do, that if we possessed the remainder of it we might manage to save that unlucky Robert."

"We have the rest," said Julien, radiantly.

"What?"

"You have kept the package I entrusted to you yesterday?"

"Of course; and so that it might be the safer I have called it about my person."

"Then, you have it here?"

M. Jean slipped his hand under his cloak and drew out a grey envelope sealed with red wax, which he handed to M. de la Chanterie.

The latter took it from him with signs of evident emotion, tore it open and exhibited a paper similar to the one which the priest had pressed between the leaves of his breviary. "Come," he cried, hastening to a garden table where M. Jean usually took his coffee on fine evenings. "Come and see, your reverence, what a miracle Providence has performed in our favour;" and he

had upon the table the two fragments of paper, placing them side by side. He examined them read as follows, several of the sentences being imperfect. The paper was found here and there. For the same reason there was no beginning and no end to this extraordinary document:—

"Since I have left all to follow thee I have not ceased a day to prove to thee my devotion. I have borne all kinds of humiliations, all the tortures of this position, with no complaint, with not troubling thee with one reproach. Self-sacrifice has its limits, and I shall never have the courage to commit infamy, for it would be an infamy to allow it to be thought by that young man that I am false. These moments when I ask myself if thy design is to——— I tell myself of me if thou dost not love me, if thou dost not despise me for indeed O——— if thou dost really love me thou wouldst not command me———ce this loyal young man———"

"To allure him here to extort from him———there are days when thou findest me, when———at of himself of this keeper who may have known thee formerly in Alsace. I entreat thee———friend——renounce this criminal design. Thou wilt again repeat that I am mad. In conclusion I leave thee in mercy to promise me that thou wilt let me go away. Oh; if thou wilt let me go, how happy we should be. Speak one word; only one word, I——"

Julien read this letter with the avidity of a man who expects to find the key of a puzzling enigma, but to his great deception, when he reached the end of the document, he had not obtained much enlightenment.

The priest, who had been reading over his shoulder, was greatly surprised, for, not having had the earlier fragments before him, he had so far been unable to get a true sense of his discovery. La Chanterie, on the other hand, despaired of ascertaining the full meaning of the various phrases, though his insight suggested a deal of their significance. In point of fact, although the ends of the pieces found by Marcel completed the fragmentary sentences, they did not show any new light on the matter or furnish any clue as to the person who had written the letter, or the person who had received it. By a strange coincidence the powder had burnt the paper exactly in the most interesting places. Thus a passage which would no doubt have solved the problem, was incomplete. It ran as follows:—"If thou didst really love me, thou wouldst not command me——ce this loyal young man———and to allure him here to extort from him———there are."

The missing words evidently stated what the recipient of the letter had ordered the murderer to do in regard to "this loyal young man," and what the latter was "to extort from him."

Thus J. and M. Jean would have been enabled, as to the mysterious murderer's identity, and might have even been able, with such a clue, to solve the mystery. Matters were even more annoying as regards the message—"I tell myself of me if thou dost not love me, if thou dost not despise me for indeed O——— if thou," &c. The missing word, the only one wanting, to complete the sentence, must have been the culprit's name, the interjection "O" clearly indicated. It really seemed as if the gunpowder had been in league with the murderer.

"It is most marvellous!" murmured Julien, so overwhelmed by this disaster, that he forgot his sufferings for awhile.

"Yes, indeed, the connection of these two pieces of paper is really extraordinary," said M. Jean. "I am not aware how the first piece came into your possession, but——"

"I found it in Bellière woods on the day after the crime on the very spot where Michel was killed, and where this child found the other fragment."

"In that case," sighed M. Jean, "there can be no longer any doubt about it this letter must have been addressed to the murderer."

"Most certainly it was. But one would think that this certainly distressed you."

"Alas ! it is hardly calculated to please me."

"Good gracious ! why ?"

"Because it strikes me that the letter could only have been written to that unfortunate man Robert, and it dispels my last illusions as to his innocence."

"Do you really think so, your reverence ?" exclaimed Julien. "Well, I am of an exactly opposite opinion, and it seems to me that this letter is conclusive proof of Monsieur Wassmann's guilt, for it could never have been addressed to anyone else but him."

"Your antipathy for my neighbour blinds you, my son," said M. Jean, "However much it costs me to say so, I am obliged to admit that the language of this fragmentary document points to poor Flagonie's husband as the author of the crime."

"I don't see that at all."

"Well, I see it only too clearly. There is especially one passage which destroys all doubt on the subject. It is that in which the writer says 'this keeper who may have seen thee formerly in Alsace.'"

"What connection do you see between Alsace and Robert?" asked M. de a Chanterie.

"The connection is self-evident when one knows, as I do, that the regiment of hussars in which Robert served was for two years garrisoned at Colmar, the birthplace of Michel Amstein, who was there at that very time. The poor poacher's wife told me this herself."

"And did she tell you she had been acquainted with Michel?"

"No ; Robert stayed in Alsace before he married her, but the fact is none the less incontestable."

"Then you think that it was she who wrote this letter ?"

"Not at all. I am certain of the contrary, for I know her handwriting, which is not at all like this."

"Then where does the letter come from ?"

"That I can't tell, but apparently it comes from some poor creature whom Robert has ill-used, — probably seduced and then deserted."

"You forget, your reverence, that the writer speaks of a devotion that has never ceased for a single day, of all kinds of humiliation, of a false position in life, and of a common sojourn in this country which she wished to leave. A woman who had had but a passing connection with Robert would never use such language surely."

"But what is there to show that this unhappy woman does not live at Charly, among us, in fact, hiding her shame, and trembling every hour at the thought that her fault may have come to light, and her seducer been condemned ? Look here, Monsieur Julien, I have been for thirty years a village priest, and I am well acquainted with country morals. The more I reflect, the more I am confirmed in the idea that the poacher, during his wandering life, has met with some poor child of this place or its neighbourhood whom he has led astray. He is still young, he has a fine athletic figure, and, thanks to his education and intelligence, he has an immense superiority over the simple peasantry. You can't imagine either what sort of fascination such a man as he exerts over the feminine nature, by making himself superior to all law and leading a free and independent life in spite of gamekeepers and gendarmes. Poachers hereabouts play the part of Calabrian brigands. They

by the sympathy and admiration of the lower classes, who naturally hate authority. They don't all look upon Robert as a hero, and he has found the eyes of some former's daughter. No doubt some such person he this letter to him."

"Excuse me, your reverence," said Julien, excitedly; "I agree with you in thinking Robert has made some conquests in the neighbourhood, but neither style nor content in expressions of the letter agree with your supposition."

"The style?" exclaimed M. Jean; "it seems to me that it is quite that of a cultivated woman, giving way to emphatic diction through reading novels. You are probably not aware that in the suburbs the smallest letter-writer, if he makes a good thing of his early produce, sends his letters to a Paris pen-writing school, where they learn too much, and yet not enough."

"But how do you explain the sentences alluding to a young man who is being deceived, or about to be deceived?"

"I fancy that it is easy to give an explanation of those sentences. Don't you see, my dear boy, that this *poor young man* is some honest workman, or labourer, hoping to marry the poor girl whom he believes to be virtuous, by whom he thinks he is beloved. What Robert orders her to *extort* from him is doubtless an offer of marriage, and I can't imagine a viler action than to live her such advice, knowing as he does what has passed between them and himself. Were I sure that Michel's murder was committed in a moment of anger, I should excuse it more easily than this cowardly treachery." "And so should I, certainly! But while recognising the fact that appears to be perhaps against Robert, I can't reconcile myself to the idea of his

It is also repugnant to me to think that he has committed murder; but Julien is mistaken, and I feel quite sure that if the paper had not been found here and these you would read after the interjection 'O'—the name of the sinner."

"Ah, your reverence, you drive me to despair," murmured Julien, overwhelmed by the weight of evidence. "The deception I now experience is the greater, as the note Jacqueline Ledoux brought me from you led me to expect better news."

"Remember," said M. Jean, "that at the moment of writing to you I was only aware of the fragmentary document which Marcel found. The fragment had no determined sense, but I was inclined to believe that they were favourable to the man in whom we are both so interested. In begging you to come here I hoped you would assist me in finding a satisfactory explanation of the writing, and I did not suspect that you would involuntarily give me proof of the man's guilt. Had I sooner seen the fragment which I found I should have spared you a useless journey and a cruel deception."

"So according to you everything goes to prove the poacher's guilt, and we must renounce all hope of establishing his innocence?"

"I fear so."

"What is to be done then, your reverence? Do you advise me to abandon Robert entirely, when we know his wife will die of grief, if—?"

"God forbid. On the contrary, I am of opinion that we ought to uphold the unfortunate man and his family in their terrible trial. But it seems to me that if he would only make a full confession, and show sincere repentance for his crime, our task would be greatly facilitated. You could plead to the fact that Robert in firing upon Michel gave way to a fatal and momentary fit

of anger, which, moreover, I feel sure was really the case. As for myself, I should be ready to attest the accused man's regret for his crime, and bear witness that he had come to a better state of mind; I would speak of his unhappy wife and little children, to whom infamy would remain attached if their father were condemned. I am certain that we should touch the feelings of the judge and obtain at any rate a lenient sentence."

"Far as the judge's indulgence might go it would not save Robert from an ignominious condemnation; but perhaps it is, alas! our only resource, and I shall probably resign myself to following your advice. However, I swear to you that it costs me a good deal to fall in with your opinion. I know that you argue with greater calmness than I do, that your conclusions could not be more sensible, that this letter by which I hoped to save Robert turns against him; and yet, despite all this, something tells me that an incredible fatality is misleading us and shielding the real culprit, and that this culprit—is Monsieur Wassmann."

"So you still cling to that theory, my son," said M. Jean, gently. "However, you won't make anyone believe that it was the foreigner who killed Michel; for he could have had no interest in committing such a murder, and besides he has clearly proved an alibi."

"Yes, it is quite possible that people won't believe me, but if they knew that for the last two days Wassmann has been on my track to prepare pitfalls for my destruction——"

"You told me that just now, my son; and I know that you are incapable of falsehood; only be convinced that you are deceived by false appearances. The person whom you wrongly suspect is, I have no doubt of it whatever, a perfectly honourable man."

"What! Your reverence, are you also duped by the hypocrisy of——"

"Just listen to me, I beg of you," interrupted M. Jean. "Like you I have had some prejudices against my neighbour at the Pavillon des Sorbiers, but they have been dispelled since I have observed his generous and delicate conduct as regards young Marcel. Not content with paying him a good sum down, to indemnify him for his fright, M. Wassmann has called to see me, and announced his intention of bearing whatever expense the child's education may eventually entail. Almost every day for a week past he has called on the Ledoux and overwhelmed them with presents. You would fancy he wished that everyone connected with the orphan child should participate in his bounty, including even Mademoiselle Rose, who keeps the café, where he first saw the poor child after the accident. The poor lady has a fever and nervous attacks, which come on every evening at nine o'clock. Well, Monsieur Wassmann has been to see her, and sends her various remedies, which he pays for out of his own purse. I may add that all this is well known in Chaully, and that the opinion of the townsfolk is entirely in favour of this worthy Austrian."

"I shall not struggle with it," said Julien, bitterly. "Will you allow me, your reverence, to keep the two halves of this letter, which may perhaps be of use to me later on?"

"It is yours, my dear boy, and may it assist you in arriving at the truth," replied M. Jean, at once; and he placed the two fragments in the envelope which had previously contained but one of them.

M. de la Chanterie had just slipped the precious parcel in his pocket-book when some footsteps were heard in the passage. "Here is the doctor at last," exclaimed the curé. And he ran out to meet the visitor, who was not at all the person he expected. It was, indeed, M. Wassmann, who suddenly showed himself on the garden threshold. Julien had quite forgotten his

and during his conversation with the priest, but for the last few minutes he had greatly increased the pain; and, moreover, the doctor's arrival was undesirable, as the swelling of the hand was rapidly increasing. When, then, M. de la Chanterie, as M. Jean announced, the young advocate espied very near whom he so detested, he was roused to a furious pitch of indignation. He rose, abruptly, and walked, with clenched teeth and threatening looks, towards this same M. Wassmann whose praises the priest had just been singing. M. Jean was quite alarmed by Julien's appearance, and fearing a scene of violence, in which the wounded man would necessarily not have the advantage, he placed himself between the young advocate and the contented priest, who was quietly coming down the garden steps. However, he soon saw that his intervention was superfluous, for M. Wassmann's intentions were entirely most peaceful. By his good-tempered smile and sympathetic expression of face, it was quite plain that he meant to treat whatever ill-tempered sallies that Julien might indulge in with all the consideration due to his fortune. He first approached M. Jean, and cordially shook hands with him, and then he turned towards Julien and bowed to him with perfect politeness.

"Allow me, sir, to inquire after your health."

"Ah, this is going too far," muttered M. de la Chanterie.

"You will perhaps think me indiscreet," continued the amiable tenant of Pavillon des Solitaires, "and I confess that nothing warrants my alluding to an affair of honour in which I took no part. But between people of the same society an infraction of the orthodox rules may occasionally be permitted, especially when this infraction is prompted by sincere interest in——"

"Many thanks, sir! but I have no wish to inspire you with the least interest," interrupted Julien.

"Granted," said M. Wassmann, gently, "but you cannot prevent my deploring the sorry issue of a quarrel in which the latter cause was defeated, and blaming the ill-mannered conduct of your opponent."

"How do you know that my opponent's conduct was ill-mannered?" asked Julien, excitedly.

"Why, sir! you are surely aware that everything is discussed in clubs. My quarrel with Monsieur de Saint-Avertin became the news of the evening almost immediately after it occurred, and the members present talked of no more, that all thought of war was forgotten. Monsieur de Saint-Avertin and his friends, who are very ill-bred, related the circumstances of the quarrel over everybody, and in such ill-judged terms, that I felt bound to silence them. Fortunately, social etiquette prohibited any further action on my part, and whatever sympathy I felt for you, I could not interfere in a more direct manner. I therefore had to limit myself to asking for some news about this quarrel, which I could not prevent. To my great grief, I learnt from one of your opponent's servants that it was to come off this morning, and I confess, that if I have called here so early to-day, it was in view of asking his reverence to make inquiries as to the result of the meeting; I was aware that our venerable friend was on terms of intimacy with you."

"Why did not you procure the information from Monsieur de Saint-Avertin?" interrupted Julien, rudely.

"I thought I had had the honour of telling you that I don't associate with such a disagreeable individual," replied M. Wassmann, taking no notice of Julien's impudent manner. "Besides, I could not have met him, for he never comes to the club before midnight, and yesterday at noon I left Paris for Charly."

"You returned to Charly yesterday. At what o'clock, please?"

"Why, at about three o'clock, if I remember rightly," said the foreigner,

with perfect composure. "I think I had the honour of bowing to our reverend friend opposite, who was just leaving the church as my carriage passed the porch."

"That's true," said M. Jean.

"What! at three o'clock!" muttered Julien, astounded to hear the priest confirm this new alibi.

The suppositions which his imagination had conjured up crumbled away one after another, and he began to ask himself whether he were not the victim of some strange hallucinations respecting this M. Wassmann, and whether the repeated apparition of a pair of red whiskers had not been entirely due to chance.

"I spent the evening taking a long drive with my daughter in the direction of Cœuilly Park," continued the tenant of the Pavillon des Sorbiers, "and I was so preoccupied as to the issue of this unfortunate business that Catherine remarked my absent-mindedness. Now, however, thank heavens, I have no further cause for anxiety, since I have the pleasure of meeting you again, wounded, it is true, but not so seriously after all. I hope——"

"Probably much more seriously than we fancy," put in M. Jean, "and M. de la Chanterie has acted very imprudently in coming to Charly instead of going to bed: I am at this moment expecting Dr. Minard, who will certainly agree with me, and I am greatly astonished that he has not yet arrived; he must have been called out for some consultation in the neighbourhood."

Julien was not listening to the priest. He was looking the German full in the face, as if trying to dive down to his very soul, and instead of replying to his kind inquiries, he suddenly asked this scarcely polite question: "May I be allowed to know, sir, to what I am indebted for the favour of all the interest you seem to take in me? I am not, so far as I am aware, in the least degree entitled to your benevolence. Further, I neither know, nor desire to know, you. I have therefore every reason to feel astonished that you should interest yourself in me in this fashion, and I——"

"Excuse me, sir," rejoined the patient foreigner; "if I have not yet been happy enough to arrive at any intimacy with you, such as I greatly desire, I may at least congratulate myself on the friendship with which I am favoured by your cousin, the Viscount Henri de Brames; and had I no other reason——"

"This reason appears to me to be quite insufficient to warrant your interference in matters which concern myself alone. My cousin is master of his own actions. I presume I am master of mine, and——"

"Doubtless, sir, but your relationship with Captain de Brames is not the only motive which draws me towards you."

"What are the others, I should like to know?"

"Why should I hesitate to confess them," exclaimed M. Wassmann, in a sympathising tone. "I felt touched on hearing of your noble desire to save the husband of an unfortunate woman——"

"What do you say? Pray what is the meaning——?"

"Oh, don't try to conceal it, sir; there is no reason why you should blush for your generous efforts to prove that poacher's innocence."

"Who told you about my efforts——"

"They are no longer a secret anywhere, and had I known of them on the day when I first had the honour of meeting you near the Marne,—under circumstances which you cannot have forgotten, had I known I say, that the guilt of the man accused of murdering the gamekeeper was by no means

proved, and that you had undertaken the very honourable task of running the real murderer to earth, I beg of you to believe, sir, that I should not wait until now to express my sympathy and admiration. I should have gone farther, sir : I should have begged of you to allow me to participate in your efforts to discover the truth, in all loyalty and openness, as becomes gentlemen, and perhaps by working together we should have succeeded in solving it."

As this was all said so warmly and frankly, that tears came to M. Jean's eyes, Julien was well nigh confounded. M. Wassmann, no doubt, perceived the effect he had made, for he pressed him with a kindly smile, and not without a slight touch of malice: "Don't ask me where I have picked up my information. I have paid sufficient for it, for I myself was suspected of the crime. Yes, indeed, such is the truth," he added by way of reply to a gesture made by M. de Charterrie. "I was summoned before the investigating magistrate and had to explain various charges brought against me by an anonymous denunciator. There is no need to tell you that I easily cleared myself, but I owe it to you that, far from feeling any grudge against the authorities for accusing me, I am glad to have had the opportunity of admiring the manner in which criminal prosecutions are conducted, and did it depend on me to clear up this mystery, I would willingly place my time and fortune at the disposal of justice. That is exactly what you are doing, sir, and I thought that as I have only admired your laudable conduct, I had a right to feel some interest in the person."

His little harangue was delivered with an accent of wounded pride and self-respect, which brought Julien's bewilderment to a climax. Fallen from the summit of his illusions, obliged to admit that his certainties had become mere fancies, he stung himself, even himself, he looked at the old oil-pipe, and read in his eyes the conviction that M. Wassmann was right. The scene was not altogether so embarrassing, excepting perhaps to the foreigner, who had in no wise lost his composure. Happily, the doctor's arrival quite changed the current of the conversation.

Doctor Minard apologised for his delay in coming; he had been called to the house to attend to a person who had just broken his leg, and now he reached Julien, and speedily unrolled the bandages round his injured wrist. As he glanced at the wound, his face became gloomy. He had expected to find a merry sparkle in his eyes, but bowed to the priest with fitting respect for his cloth, and to M. Wassmann with all the respect due to a worthy man, who might some day become a valuable patient; then he had reached Julien with the easy air doctors are wont to assume, in view of ensuring their patients before even commencing the examination. This air always seems to imply: "Don't alarm yourself; it's a mere nothing; and now I know everything that will be required to cure you." It is almost a sign-board bearing the inscription, "Good health sold here." However, as the doctor they often pull a long face; their forehead grows thoughtful; they press their lips, in order to avoid pronouncing the words, "it's very serious!" which can be read however, clearly enough on their countenances. It was the case with M. Minard now. He made Julien sit down, and, turning himself on one side a little in the rear, he proceeded to examine the wound carefully.

Torn out by all the talking, the young advocate had sunk back on the garden seat and half-closed his eyes, so that he could not see the doctor's gestures. M. Jean, on the contrary, did not lose a single shrug of M. Minard's shoulders, and M. Wassmann had so stationed himself as to have a full view of this

suggestive pantomime, which seemed to interest him in a high degree. The priest and the foreigner thus waited to hear the doctor's report ; but time went on without him speaking and they did not dare to question him.

"It's incredible," grumbled M. Minard at last ; "the wound has not even had a first dressing. It has barely been bathed, and bound up to keep it from contact with the air ; and yet the sword—for it certainly is a sword wound—must have passed very close to the main artery, and, in transpiercing the flesh between the two bones of the forearm, it must necessarily have torn the periosteum."

"And you are not aware, my dear doctor," murmured the priest ; "you are not aware this dear boy was so grievously imprudent as to travel by rail in his present condition."

"What idiot ! what village quack can have authorized such mad locomotion ?" exclaimed M. Minard, with the righteous indignation which every member of the Faculty displays when a person not licensed to practise the healing art presumes to play the doctor.

"Don't accuse any one," said Julien in a weak voice, "it was my own absolute wish to set out at once ; and as no doctor was present at the duel —"

"What, sir ! you were as foolish as that, and set out for a duel without taking any doctor, at the risk of speedily dying from frightful hemorrhage, and for want of somebody who knew how to tie up a severed artery or vein ! It would be a thousand times better to fight a duel without seconds, and if I were a legislator, I would enact severe penalties against fools who venture to do without——"

"I was in the wrong, I own, but I am not dead, and as I can now rely on your skill and care——"

"You are not dead ! you are not dead !" echoed the doctor ; "certainly not, and I hope you won't die ; but if you think this wound is a simple scratch, you are greatly deceived, and you may pay dearly for your carelessness, for, on my word of honour—I can't get over it—it was so easy for you as you passed Vincennes to beg the first assistant army surgeon you came across, to go with you to the duelling-ground."

"But, doctor, I fought the duel near Chatou, so I could not ——"

"Then you could have found one at the Courbevoie barracks. Besides, it seems that you have been even more foolish than I thought at first, since instead of *one* railway journey you have actually made two. You evidently wished to risk your life after the duel as before it."

"Well—what is there to be afraid of ?" asked Julien, hesitatingly.

"All the complications you like to name—all, and the least that can befall you is that you will have to keep your bed for a fortnight, and your room for six weeks," said the doctor, abruptly.

"Six weeks ! That's quite impossible ! I am not going to stay six weeks shut up at home, when my presence is indispensable here and at ——"

"Here ! did you say ? I'm sure I hope that you won't stir."

"What, doctor ? Why I must get back to Paris this morning."

"Well, I formally oppose any such conduct, and I forbid your taking any journey, under pain of death."

"Ah ! good heavens !" murmured the priest, joining his hands in prayer.

"Is it as serious as that ?" asked M. Wassmann in a low tone, and leaning towards the doctor.

"I repeat that I am obliged to start," continued Julien.

Ah ! So you compel me to speak out !" exclaimed M. Minard. "Very good, then. You must understand that in your present condition, and in the great loss of the day, there are three chances to one that, owing the risk of gangrene on one side, you will be taken with lock-jaw, which will carry you clean off."

"My dear son, I beg of you," said M. Jean softly, "think of the grief you would cause your uncle—and—Mademoiselle de Brannes."

"But, your reverence, what am I to do ?" sighed the wounded man, somewhat shaken in his resolution : "I cannot obtain proper attendance at an inn, even supposing that there is one at Charly."

"What ! Is it that which worries you : when you can go to the Château of Esseneuil, where the count will be so delighted to receive you," interrupted the doctor. "It is much better for you to stay there than in Paris even, for you will require constant attention and perfect quiet."

"I can't drop in on my uncle without the risk of thoroughly frightening him, and frightening—"

"I will undertake to prepare everyone interested in you for your arrival at the château," whispered the worthy priest.

Amidst a blush, for M. Jean had divined the truth. The injured man was deeply worried as to the effect which his misadventure would have on Mademoiselle de Brannes. However, he still hesitated, for it seemed hard to refuse taking an active part in the priest's case. M. Jean's arguments had not yet entirely convinced him of M. Wessmann's innocence, and it was most urgent to him to leave the field free. The doctor felt that it was necessary to add a final touch to his previous words, and he had recourse to a somewhat unexpected argument.

"Look here !" he exclaimed, "you're surely not going to expose yourself to the voluntary loss of a limb just when you may be called upon at any moment to serve your country. Yes ! I say lose a limb ; for I have seen soldiers perform it for less cause than this. What the deuce do you want to use an arm for ? At any rate let it be on the field of battle."

"We have not come to that yet, thank God !" remarked M. Jean.

"Eh ! who knows !" answered M. Minard, "war is declared, or almost so, and no one knows how it will end. It's all very fine to shout out that we are going to Berlin and are going there again ; but the Germans once came to Paris, and would like to come there again. Now Monsieur de la Chanterie belongs to the Mobile Guard, which will be called out directly we are in the front line. He is a plucky fellow, and he ought to be ready to march if the country should need him."

"Yes, certainly," said Julien with sparkling eyes.

"Do you know, doctor, you are not over-estimating in your statements," remarked the priest : "I know nothing of military matters, but I have perfect confidence in our soldiers' valour."

"So have I," retorted the doctor, who while talking had properly bandaged his injured wrist ; "but the wise man is prepared for all emergencies, you know. I served during the Italian campaign in '58 as an auxiliary surgeon, and I have seen what a chance thing victory is ; to my mind it is quite as likely that I shall be requisitioned for an ambulance corps stationed at Charly, under the enemy's fire, as that I shall learn within a month from now that we have conquered the whole left bank of the Rhine."

"My dear doctor," said M. Wessmann smiling, "I can assure you that the Prussians will give you no chance of exercising your professional skill, at least in this quiet village, for the Prussians will never enter France ; but if by any pos-

sibility they did reach this part, I commend myself beforehand to your good care, as I am perfectly determined to risk my life, or limbs, rather than to let the enemy enter Charly, and pillage my pretty villa."

"Really? You would really fight for us?" asked M. Minard. "I thought that in your quality of foreigner——"

"I am an Austrian, sir, and as such, very desirous of taking my revenge for Sadowa."

"Quite right; I did not think of that; but as you will be one of ourselves, sir," said the doctor gaily, "I have no fear for our Charly. We four will defend it vigorously; for I feel sure that his reverence would willingly shoulder a musket, if need were; and as for Monsieur de la Chanterie, who will certainly be cured, if he only follows my advice——"

"I will follow it, doctor," said Julien, "for I have made up my mind to stay at the château, providing that my uncle is willing to receive me there."

"Do you doubt it, my son?" exclaimed the priest. "I will go at once to announce your arrival to Monsieur de Brannes, and when he learns——"

"Excuse my interrupting you, your reverence," began M. Wassmann, "but I must now take leave of you, for I fear that by prolonging my visit, I may inconvenience Monsieur de la Chanterie, who needs all your care, and our excellent doctor's too. Allow me, sir," turning towards Julien, "to express my truest wishes for your prompt recovery, and to hope that we shall become better acquainted."

Having said this, the foreigner bowed with perfect composure, and went off as he had come—that is, without any noise or fluster whatever.

"That's first-rate!" exclaimed M. Minard; "that's the sort of German I like; and if they were all like him on the other side of the Rhine——"

However, the doctor did not conclude this panegyric on his client of the Pavillon des Sorbiers, for he saw that no one was listening to him. Julien had risen from his armchair and had led the good priest to the end of the garden, where, in a voice full of emotion, he exclaimed, "You know what it costs me to abandon, even momentarily, the difficult task which I have undertaken; but I feel that the doctor is right, and I wish to live so as to take up the case again later on. Until I am able to set to work at it once more, promise me, your reverence, that you will watch for me, without neglecting anything which could help us to prove Robert's innocence; for I do not renounce the task of defending him, or the hope of saving him altogether."

"I will help you as far as it lies in my power to do," said M. Jean, sadly, "but I really despair of achieving the result which we are both so anxious for."

VIII.

It was fortunate for Julien de la Chanterie that he followed Doctor Minard's advice, for very serious symptoms soon set in, and during several weeks his life was really in danger. Lockjaw luckily had not declared itself, but the inflammation had reached the arm, the wound had a very bad appearance, and more than once the medical men, summoned in consultation from Paris, discussed the advisability of amputation, against which, however, the patient always energetically protested. What would have happened to the unlucky fellow if, in his imprudence, he had persisted in his idea of returning to the Rue de Verneuil, and voluntarily foregoing his uncle's hospitality? But for the continual care he received at the château, but for his cousin's presence at his bedside, he would have died of impatience and grief, even supposing that science

succeeded in preventing any terrible result from the wound. At M. de Brannes's house, however, he was in the best possible position for struggling against injury and despair; and it was less his own vigorous constitution than M. de Brannes's presence that enabled him to resist the fever which was consuming

people don't die easily at five-and-twenty, especially when they know that one loves them; and the proud, capricious young girl who had delighted in seeing Julien when he was well had not been able to hide from him, now that he was wounded, that she really loved him. Still more, she had cursed her own ambition which had caused this misfortune, and, instead of thinking of saving any further perilous tasks upon her cousin, she reflected as to how she might prevent him from proceeding with the dangerous enterprise, and made him from sacrificing himself in his efforts to prove the problemativeness of the poacher. This miracle was really due to M. de Saint-Avertin, for not a day passed but what Julien blessed his luck in having been wounded on the island of Croissy.

The Count de Brannes, never having been admitted into his nephew's confidence as regards the man accused of murdering his gamekeeper, failed to notice any happy change in Julien's mind and manner. He only thought of the result of the duel, and never ceased reviling the Paris clubs, or rather the society that was admitted to them, for being himself a member of the Jockey Club he could hardly blame the institution of clubs in general. He was also very indignant with his son Henri, who had neither prevented the taking place nor assisted his cousin on the ground; and matters would have been bad for Henri had the count known that his son's negligence in the matter was due to the absorbing nature of his passion for Mademoiselle Wassmann. M. de Brannes persisted in keeping both the father and daughter at a distance; and, although M. Wassmann often sent to inquire after M. de Brannes's health, he had not yet dared to show himself at the château.

The only persons seen by Julien outside his family were his two seconds, M. de Launay and Du Tremblay, who constantly visited him, bringing him news from Paris; and very sad news it was, for the series of French defeats had continued, and each week some mournful despatch arrived, saddening poor Julien already so sorely tried by the early reverses of the campaign. It is needless to add that M. Jean never failed to keep Julien company as often as the duties of his ministry allowed. Since the duel the worthy priest had borne an unaided heavy burden, for there was but himself to watch over Robert's health and to take measures for the unlucky family. Now this dual mission, entrusted to him by M. de la Chanterie, and so heartily accepted, had brought him no satisfaction whatever.

After two months' questioning and cross-questioning, confrontations and inquiries, the investigation concerning the murder of M. de Brannes's gamekeeper had not advanced a step. The poacher still denied his guilt as energetically as he had done on the first day; the witnesses said nothing fresh, the most careful search had failed to discover the author of the warning addressed to Jacqueline Ledoux. Even the evidence discreetly obtained in regard to M. Wassmann had brought nothing more to light. Plainly enough the Austrian had nothing whatever to do with the case.

The magistrate, although personally convinced of Robert's guilt, quite contented himself with this guilt was not fully proven, and, moved by conscientious scruples, which did him honour, he persisted in searching for fresh evidence before sending the prisoner before the Assizes. Pending the discovery of any proof of innocence or guilt, Robert still remained in jail, and everything

seemed to indicate that he would remain there some time longer. His poor wife, worn out by grief, was visibly fading away, and, to crown matters, the Cormier's business had been going from bad to worse ever since the declaration of war. The worthy priest thus saw only desolation and ruin around him; he almost despaired of succeeding in his task, and each time that he went to Paris to visit his charges he came back feeling sadder, for he did not know how to remedy their distress.

He kept his grief to himself, however, and whenever M. de la Chanterie questioned him as to the progress of the case, he limited himself to replying, that it remained much the same as before and that the trial would certainly never come before the September Assizes, as had been at first imagined. M. Jean was silent also respecting the sorrows of the poacher's wife; Mademoiselle de Brannes was too much inclined to excite herself when her sympathy was appealed to on this woman's behalf, and he tried to turn the sensitive girl's charitable views in another direction—that of poor Marcel—whom it was quite permissible to love and help without being in any way compromised. He succeeded fairly well in this direction, and Gabrielle, roused from her somewhat thoughtless enthusiasm in aid of the poacher's wife, attached herself to the orphan, who, by the way, was not wanting in protectors, for during the last six weeks M. Wassmann had seemed bent on overwhelming him with presents. Gabrielle, on her side, often summoned the lad to the château, pampered and petted him, stuffed him with cakes and sweets, and had even some idea of teaching him the piano. Julien talked of seeing to Marcel's future; the count approved both of his daughter's kindness and his nephew's schemes; and Ledoux and his wife congratulated themselves on having kept the little foundling, who brought them in so many presents. Everything, therefore, went well at Charly, and on this head M. Jean had no anxiety.

He was none the less pre-occupied by what occurred in the Rue de Charonne and at the Palais de Justice, and he ardently wished that he could put an end to the situation, which was becoming more and more painful to every one concerned in it. Prompt measures being necessary with regard to Antoine Cormier's monetary embarrassment, the worthy priest applied to M. de Brannes, and the count generously promised to place his purse at the cabinet-maker's service as soon as M. Jean asked him to do so. It was less easy for the curé to alleviate the sorrow of the deserted wife, for her husband obstinately refused to see her, although the investigating magistrate had granted her access to the prison; and the inexplicable repugnance which the poacher evinced for his unhappy wife Eugénie gave rise to all kinds of suppositions. The priest asked himself if this woman had been guilty of misconduct in former times, or if Robert merely disliked her because he preferred another woman. In the latter case, the other woman was probably Jacqueline's unknown correspondent, the writer also of the letter found torn in half in Beldre woods.

M. Jean wished to clear up all these mysterious points before committing him self to any definite course of action. He scarcely believed any longer in the husband's innocence, but disliked being obliged to doubt the wife. He had found a situation for her among some respectable shopkeepers, and only awaited the issue of Robert's case to ask her to accept it.

He resolved to make a last attempt to ascertain the truth, and, one day towards the end of August, he left Charly, intending to visit the poacher at Mazas, and to try and obtain from him a partial confession, which he certainly did not intend to use against him.

It was not the first time he had seen Robert at the prison, and although he had,

er, been unable to obtain any revelations from him, he did not yet despair of winning his confidence by dint of kind words and generous behaviour. He usually seemed pleased to see him, and showed himself grateful for the small presents of chocolate and cigars which M. Jean never failed to take. This fellow, a rebel to all social laws, intractable as a prisoner, accustomed, however, to answering the magistrate in violent language, softened visibly when he was in the presence of the good old priest. He did not become communicative, and his manner remained brusque, but he was never unmannerly, and he quite abandoned the mocking tone which he freely indulged in when before the magistrate.

The priest, who was firmly decided this time to try everything he could to cheer Robert's heart, was led as usual to the gloomy little parlour, where he was allowed to talk with him, though a grating, it is true, but without any order being present. A few minutes later the prisoner appeared, and was led into a kind of cage, the bars of which were sufficiently wide apart to allow of his shaking hands with his kind-hearted visitor. "Thank you for coming, your reverence," he said, not without some display of emotion, from which M. Jean guessed well. "For not seeing any more of you, I thought you also had abandoned me."

"Neither I, nor any of the people interested in you, will ever abandon you," answered the priest, gently.

"Why, who excepting yourself, is at all interested in me?"

"Don't you guess?"

"Lord, no! I can't guess," said Robert, indifferently; "unless you mean the man who was going to buy my cray fish when his uncle had me arrested. I saw by his face that he did not believe in the gendarme's absurd reasoning, I shouldn't be surprised if he had spoken up for me. But with that exception I know of no one interested in my troubles."

"What! nobody!" exclaimed M. Jean. "What! you haven't a single friend in the world?"

"A friend! Oh! I had plenty of friends when I had some money."

"And they have forsaken you in your misfortune?"

"Entirely: besides such has been the rule ever since the world began. Isn't there a Latin line which says so? For I used to know Latin, though you now know what I've come to. Certainly I have pretty well forgotten it, but I was as well educated as most people, and all the same, now here I am at Mazas. Ah! education is a fine thing!"

"Granted! but men are ungrateful and forgetful too," murmured the priest, who did not think it worth while to reply to this lively sally; "women are much readier in succouring misfortune."

"Women! they are far worse; they deceive for the mere pleasure of living, and preferentially those who are silly enough to love them."

"Do you fancy then that some woman betrayed you and your secrets to the representatives of the law?" asked M. Jean excitedly, thinking at the moment of the anonymous letter.

"No; for it's a long time since I trusted any woman," replied the poacher, hesitatingly.

An accused criminal, fearing his mistress's indiscretion, would not have answered so positively, and the worthy priest was delighted at this declaration. "In this respect," he answered, "you have acted rightly, and had you always shown such discretion during your sad career——"

"Sad career! why so, pray? Because I paid no taxes, or because I was an elector? It was an advantage I had over resident citizens, licensed

townsfolk and all that sort of thing. You will say that I value my rights of citizenship too cheaply, but politics once cost me too dearly for me to take any interest in them nowadays. You will perhaps reproach me with putting myself above the game and household laws! But what would you have? I was born with wandering tendencies and a horror of all discipline."

"Nevertheless, when you were young, you enlisted in the army," objected M. Jean, who was on the lookout for an opportunity of leading the conversation up to the poor woman whom Robert had married when a non-commissioned officer in the hussars.

"Quite true," said Robert; "but it was only out of love for the uniform. I had at that time a most foolish infatuation for plumes and lace, but I was quickly cured of it. Stable duty, sentry-go, and other like diversion soon disgusted me with the business. Ah! if we had only had a jolly war, I should perhaps have taken some fancy to the profession; but chance ordained that my regiment never went on active service during my time."

"I am certain you would have done your duty bravely."

"I can't tell, but I know I should have fought like any other man, and better than some. Why, since they locked me up, it seems they have come to blows with Prussia, and its going against us——"

"Alas! the enemy is now in France, and God knows if we shall not see the Germans at the very gates of Paris."

"Ah well, if the governor of Mazas would only give me leave to go and do a month's service with the sabre against those rascally Germans whom I so detest, I would willingly swear to come back to prison as soon as the fighting was over, and I would keep my oath as well as Regulus did. There's another little touch of college learning for you! It seems that the cellular system is favourable to Roman history——"

"But for this unhappy business you would be free and able to serve your country."

"If I have rotted here for the last two months, it is entirely the fault of the gendarmes, who took me for some one else. Bah! I shall be acquitted at the September Assizes, and there will perhaps be still time to have a turn at the Prussians—there is one of them in particular whom I should be glad to get within reach of my sword."

"You hope for an acquittal, then?"

"Do you think me guilty, your reverence, as you think I shall be convicted?"

"No," said M. Jean, warmly; "and I ask nothing better than to become fully convinced of your innocence, but I own that appearances are against you, and as God only reads all the hearts of men——"

"You fear that the jury will give my head to the public prosecutor so as not to disoblige him. After all, it is quite probable. I shall console myself with the thought that I shall be but a pendant to Lesurque. Besides, I am not good for much nowadays, and as for anyone regretting me if I receive marching orders for the other world, the matter isn't worth talking about."

"You forget that you have two children,—a wife who loves you—who has never ceased to love you."

"Eugénie!" exclaimed the poacher. "Ah! We have come to it at last, have we? I fancied it was to her you alluded just now, when you said that some one was interested in me."

"And you were not wrong in your surmises. Your wife only lives for you. She only thinks of saving you, and her only wish is to see you. She would consider herself happy could she but sacrifice herself to restore you to liberty."

"She should have begun by not having me arrested."

"You know as well as I do," said the priest, severely, "that she had not guised you when you left the Belière woods."

"I know that she delivered me up to my pursuers; that's about all I do know."

"She has bitterly regretted the involuntary wrong she did you."

"You call it a wrong. She has made me safe for the guillotine."

"If you would not only listen to her, but consent to see her——"

"Has she requested you to ask me this?"

"Why should I hide it from you? I came here on her behalf. Your sister is dying; she is exhausting her strength by wandering round and dashing against the prison walls, and if you reject her last request she will die of grief. You have no pity on her, consent to see her out of gratitude to me, who have always been your defender."

"Never! Ask me anything but that, I hate her too much."

"The mother of your children!" exclaimed M. Jean, indignantly.

"My children!" repeated Robert, in a tone of irony.

"Yes. Do you hate them too, poor little beings?"

"No. I liked them too much in former days to hate them, but I have taken oath that I will never look on them again."

"Ah!" said the priest, mournfully, "I would rather learn you were a sinner than hear such blasphemy proceed from your mouth."

Robert did not answer, his pallor betrayed the emotion he was experiencing, and by his contracted features, it was easy to see that a violent struggle was going place in his heart.

"You don't know my story," he said at last, in a broken voice. "I wished to keep it to myself, but you force me to tell it to you, for I don't want you to despise me. Books have doubtless told you, since the police have raked up all past life. They have told you, I say, that I deserted from my regiment, plotted against the government, and ruined and abandoned my wife after having seduced her?"

"Yes, I have been told all that, but——"

"Well, all that is true; but what people haven't told you is that I have been the victim of perfidious treachery."

"By whom have you been betrayed?"

"By whom? You spoke to me just now of a friend, of a wife. Ah, well! I have been betrayed by a man, who called himself my friend, and by a wife who loved, whatever she now dares to pretend."

"What! by your wife?"

"Yes. Just listen to this. The story is a short one, for I won't indulge in justifications or recriminations. I wished to become rich, for her sake much more than for my own; I went into business, and as I understood nothing of it, I went partners with a foreigner whom I thought an honest man, but who turned out to be a villainous blackguard."

"A foreigner!" murmured M. Jean.

"Yes, a Prussian. You now understand why I should so enjoy sabring his patriots."

"May I ask his name?"

"His name? Tichdorf, if you wish to know it."

"Ah!" said the vicar, with a gesture, the meaning of which the poacher did not guess.

"In less than three years' time," continued Robert, "this scamp made me a ruined man, and I have since learnt he enriched himself at my expense; that is nothing. Not satisfied with ruining me, my amiable associate drew

me into a political conspiracy, which he took good care to denounce to the police. He received a good round sum for his information, and I was condemned by default; in fact, had it not been for an amnesty I should still be in England, or already at the galleys."

"How abominable! and you have never seen this man since?"

"Never, thank Providence! He had returned to Prussia, and I had no wish to go and look for him. That's the balance sheet of friendship! Now let us turn to love affairs," said Robert, bitterly.

"Remember that you are striving to prove your own innocence, and don't slander an innocent woman," sighed M. Jean.

"An innocent woman!" sneered the poacher. "Tichendorf's treachery is nothing beside hers. She deceived me with a scamp who had been my comrade in the hussars, and whom I had welcomed to my home like a brother. I certainly did challenge him, and I killed him; but as to her, I had no time to treat her as she richly deserved, for I was obliged to fly——"

"She was not guilty—she had been unjustly accused—an anonymous letter was the cause of it—she told me everything."

"What! she had the impudence to do so! Did she also tell you that she had been deceiving me for ten years, when I discovered her infamy? Did she tell you of her underhand visits to the Foundling Hospital?"

"To the Foundling Hospital!" repeated M. Jean. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," exclaimed Robert, "that this woman who takes such a lively interest in my fate, and who has known how to make you compassionate her; I mean, I say, and I could prove it, that she betrayed me even before I was foolish enough to marry her. The child she went to see at the hospital was hers; she had concealed its birth from me, and I should have been ignorant of its existence if a friend, or an unknown enemy, had not warned me that my virtuous companion repaired every day to the Foundling Hospital, where the brat was being nursed at the expense of the Government."

"And you believed this odious slander?"

"Perfectly; for what you call slander was the exact truth. I watched this tender mother narrowly, and I saw her with my own eyes gliding towards the hospital, where you could no doubt find the record of her shame inscribed on the registers. It is useless to tell you what I suffered after this terrible discovery, but you have yet to learn how relentlessly I was pursued by fate. I went home and awaited the return of the miserable woman who had dishonoured me. I wished to confound her, make her confess her crime, kill her and then destroy myself."

"Stop, you unhappy man!"

"Why should I stop? That end would have been preferable to the one I now await. But I had no time to avenge myself. I had scarcely begun to question her than she grew pale and stammered.—the avowal was on her lips, and I only awaited it to strike the blow, but the authorities were on my track, for I had been denounced for conspiracy that very morning, and the police were about to surround my house—one of my accomplices, the only one who was not a traitor to me, came hastily to warn me of it. I still hesitated. I wished to die, but he dragged me off. I never saw my wife again till the evening when she handed me over to the gendarmes on the banks of the Marne. Do you now understand why I refuse to see her? Can you also understand that I have sworn never to look upon my children again—her children, I should say."

"What! you dare to suspect——"

"I dare everything, and I am in the right. The woman, who deceived me

she married me, must also have deceived me after marrying me. I have told her and her whole race. If a trial were held me for being on the side of La Rochette, without having really incurred the penalty, it would be assurance that I am now freed from the whole brood—and yet I was so of them.” continued Robert in a broken voice. “And even now—look here! I recall the time when I pressed the elder of them on my knee, whilst the other smiled at me in his cradle, I feel quite upset——”

“God bids us pardon those who have wronged us.”

“God! Never.”

Jean, indignant at such hard-heartedness, was about to reply by a warm assurance, when the door of the waiting-room opened. A warder came in and quickly reminded the priest that the regulation hour allowed for his visit was now over. The prisoner rose up, bowed without further remark, and invited another warder who was waiting for him, back to his cell.

Amazed by what he had just heard, and disturbed by the gaoler's presence, Jean had not courage to urge his petition any further, and silently followed his way through the long passages of the gloomy building, which was wide, as long, and as full of echoes as a cathedral nave. He crossed the prison doors, and the wall, and arrived on the Pontard de Mazas, bewildered by the strange statements of this strange prisoner, who talked only of recrimination, instead of defending himself. Was he speaking truth, and was it to be believed that the unhappy woman Eugénie was guiltier than miserable? This is what the priest asked himself while he went slowly past the prison wall, with his head bowed, when suddenly as he reached the first side street he found himself face to face with the deserted woman. She was seated on a boundary-stone, her body bent, her arms hanging by her side, while her head was thrown back, and her eyes were on the roof of the house of detention barely visible above the wall. Once, she saw and started at M. Jean, and came towards him pale and trembling: “Well?” she asked with all the strength she could command. She at once guessed that he was on his way from Mazas, and felt certain that he had been pleading her cause with Robert.

“He still refuses to see you,” murmured M. Jean.

“Then it only remains for me to die,” said Eugénie, in a trembling voice.

“Come, madam,” continued the priest, “I want to talk to you, and it is as well that our friends of the Rue de Charonne should not be present at the interview.” And so saying he drew her in the direction of the deserted garden, where a few weeks previously she had confided her troubles to him.

That day, the esplanade planted with scrubby trees, which extends as far as Pont d'Assinatz, was even more solitary than usual, for during that month of August, and its Paris no longer strolled along by the water.

They went, therefore, able to find a seat on a bench without anyone seeing them, and M. Jean, already at ease, began to repeat, in softened tones, the charges which the prisoner had brought against his wife. It cost him good deal to touch on such a painful subject, but he would have blushed to have had recourse to any underhand device to discover the truth, and he felt it more honorable to question the woman frankly. At his first mention of Robert's jealousy, and the scandal which it had occasioned, Eugénie burst into tears. But she soon mastered her emotion and replied in a steady voice.

“Robert is unjust. He has forgotten that the man who slandered me deceived him, and thus showed how far he was worthy of trust. That scoundrel, who denounced my husband to the police, at the same time as he de-

nounced me to my husband. It is impossible to place any belief in what he said, and I should lower myself in trying to refute his statements."

"I would that the prisoner were here to hear you!" exclaimed M. Jean, struck by the simplicity of her protestations and the frankness of her tone. "But, alas!" he added, after a pause, "that is not everything."

"What else does he accuse me of, then?" asked Eugénie, bitterly.

"He spoke to me—of a child—whose birth was concealed from him—of a child you visited secretly at the Foundling Hospital."

"A child! the hospital! and he suspected me of——ah! this is too much!—and I did not think that Robert's blindness could go as far as imputing to me such infamy!"

"He listened to the tales of that Prussian. On his information he followed you, and surprised you entering the hospital. He asserts that he is certain the child was yours."

"Mine! Ah! If I had been his mother I should never have parted with him. I should have nursed him had it cost me my honour—even my life."

"Then there is such a child in existence! Is it true that you did visit one?"

"Yes, it is quite true; yes, such a child exists, or did exist at the time when Robert was obliged to leave France; but this child—this child—was his own."

"What do you say?"

"Yes; this child—a little boy—belonged to him and to an unlucky woman whom he had betrayed. It is a sad story—sadder even than mine. One day, some weeks before the catastrophe which separated me from my husband, I received a letter, begging of me to come at once to see a dying woman, who had a great favour to beg of me. I set out at once, and at the end of a long room in the Hôtel-Dieu, lying in an hospital bed, I saw a poor woman, who told me the story of her life. Robert had seduced and deserted her. For ten years she had struggled against misery. Being too poor to nurse the child she had brought into the world, she had had recourse to public charity; but she had never ceased to think of her boy, and to hope that some day she might be able to remove him from the hospital, for he had a mark by which she knew him. Attacked by a mortal disease, she now felt she would never see him again, and at her last hour thinking of the man who had ruined her ——"

"Why did she not apply to him?"

"She had done so several times for many years, but Robert, whether he had any animus against her, whether he then loved me, and the remembrance of his former attachment, worried him; Robert, at all events, had never replied to her messages. She knew that he was married; no doubt she had been told I worshipped him, and worshipped my children. Mothers have their kind of inspirations, and she thought she would not beg my help in vain——"

"And I am sure she was not mistaken."

"No; I accepted the legacy she thrust upon me, and I promised her that I would watch over her son—over Robert's son. She died the next day; she had left me some papers and other proofs of her son's identity. I kept my promise. I visited the hospital in the poor woman's name, and they allowed me to see the child. I returned there several times, for each time I grew more attached to the little fellow."

"And you never thought of telling your husband what had occurred?"

"I often did think of doing so, but my courage failed me. Robert was already lending an ear to the slander of that German scoundrel, and our household was too troubled for me to give any fresh cause of quarrelling."

never, I quite understood that all this could not go on for ever, and I could certainly have revealed it to Robert; but the events you are acquainted with occurred. I was summoned from my husband, and I had not the time to him——”

“What I say if can you read to him,” exclaimed M. Jean: “that is, if you have any proofs which shall enable to establish the truth of your story.”

“Proofs are not lacking. The hospital register testifies that the child was born and also born in Paris at a time when I was still at school at Meaux. I have kept the certificate of birth and the paper describing the marks of identity which the unhappy mother entrusted to me.”

“But what has become of the child?”

“Alas! I cannot tell,” said Marguerite, sadly: “and if I have anything to reproach myself with, it is with regard to this poor little fellow.”

“You abandoned him then?” asked M. Jean.

“Involuntarily, I can assure you. This is what happened. My husband’s death drove me to despair, and he left me in my misfortune, my younger child seriously ill. I could not leave him alone. I remained like this for a long time, unable to move, almost dead by grief and anxiety, unable even to think about anything. However, when the first pang was over, I hastened to the hospital——”

“And the child was dead?”

“No, thank heaven; but I thought he had been sent to the foundling establishment at Meaux, in the first week of his life. He was sickly and feeble, and did not grow; and the doctors had decided to send him to the sea-side, so that he might breathe the fresh air. We were then at the beginning of spring, and the first month of the killing season. What could I do? My own children needed my care. I could not leave Paris——”

“But later on, when the child returned in the autumn——”

“Then we had fallen into a cruel misfortune. Misfortune comes so swiftly, and my husband had succumbed to exhaust my scanty resources and estrange my remaining friends. I was driven from the house I lived in, despoiled of everything, reduced to beg my bread from door to door, and then it was I who the worsting. What could I have been doing when you met me. How could I have dared to show my face in the hospital, and even if I had had the courage to do so, what protection, what help could I have offered the poor deserted child? I gave up the idea of seeing him——”

“And you don’t know if he is still at the hospital, if he is still living there?”

“I have never tried to find out; and yet, many a time, after I had been visiting at some village fête, and I had found the farthing to reach my wretched inn, many a time I was tempted to enter that building where Robert’s child was being brought up by public charity——”

“And years have elapsed since you ceased going there?”

“Three years. My husband left France in August, 1867. The child was then ten years old; I have still got the certificate of birth, which his unfortunate mother entrusted to my care on her death-bed; for the little fellow had been duly registered before being taken to the foundling hospital. I also have a paper on which she has enumerated all the marks which might facilitate his identification, and these marks agree with those recorded on the books of the authorities.”

“Then it would be easy to compare, and to prove to your husband that you have been slandered.”

"Certainly, and had I previously known that he accused me of such odious deception, I should not have waited till now to justify myself."

"Well, I will take upon myself to plead your cause with him, and I think I may promise you that I shall win the fight. Only, you must trust me with those documents——"

"Here they are," said Eugénie, excitedly, as she drew from her bodice a little, well worn case. "I have never ceased carrying them about my person—a street singer, you know, has no furniture in which she can lock up her belongings."

"I accept them, and will make early use of them," replied the curé, placing the papers in his pocket book. "For to-day, the visiting hour is over; besides I want to call on our friends in the Rue de Charonne."

"You will find them in a sad way—their business doesn't prosper—and worse than that, although Madame Cormier has not confided her husband's worries to me, I know that they are very great. And I'll confess to you, that had I not been lucky enough to meet you, I meant to write unknown to them, and beg of you to come. You are so kind, that I felt sure you would do all you could to help them, for they're worthy people."

"I will go at once," said M. Jean.

"Perhaps it will be better for me not to accompany you," murmured the poacher's wife, blushing.

The priest guessed she wished to tarry near the prison, and gaze once more at the dark walls which separated her from her husband.

"Be sensible," he said gently, "I shall return to Charly after seeing Monsieur Cormier, but to-morrow I shall come back to Paris; I will then go to the hospital and learn if the child is living, and when I have verified your statements I will see your husband, and I hope that I shall be able to bring you good news."

Thereupon, without waiting for any thanks, M. Jean rose up and walked off towards the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. He was greatly affected, and he blessed Providence for having procured him this meeting; for he had felt relieved of a great weight since he had heard Eugénie's explanations; he did not doubt her sincerity, and even before listening to her it had been dreadfully repugnant to him to believe her guilty. He decided that he would tell M. de la Chanterie this comforting story, and talk it over with him, so as to draw from it such inferences as might be in the poacher's favour.

It is not a far cry from the Pont d'Austerlitz to the Rue de Charonne, and the priest, who walked fast, soon reached the entrance of the large courtyard, at the further end of which Antoine Cormier resided. The door of the shop was open, and, as M. Jean approached, he saw the cabinet-maker's wife leaning against a wardrobe. He guessed she was crying, and he stopped short, greatly perplexed, for he hardly liked to surprise her in the midst of her grief, and yet he wished to ask her the cause of it, so as to supply a remedy. He ended by coughing, whereupon Louise Cormier turned round, and having recognised him came forward, striving hard to conceal her tears.

"Ah! your reverence," she said, in an husky voice, "how glad Antoine will be to see you—although you arrive at a sad time—but never mind, your visit will do him good, without reckoning that you may be able to give him some good advice."

"Advice and help too, my dear lady, and I hope that he won't refuse either, for I shall offer him both most willingly."

"Oh! he knows that—and so do I—we know your kindness, and we are certain that if it only depended upon you—but we are in such a frightful position—that I fear nothing you could do would help us out of it."

M. Jean smiled. He guessed that Louise had great faith in his kind intentions; but she doubted the length of his purse. "What is amiss then?" he asked, gently.

"Our very existence and that of our poor children is at stake," murmured Antoine Cormier's wife, stifling a sob. "We are threatened with being sold; our stock-in-trade is already seized, and our furniture about to be so too; and in a few days, if we don't find means of paying our creditor, we shall be turned into the street. Ah! if it were only a matter of my husband and myself! Antoine would begin again as a journeyman; I have courage, and could find needle-work. But, the little ones—what will become of them—good heavens!"

"And you have waited till you are reduced to such extremities before telling me about your trouble?" exclaimed M. Jean, in a reproachful, but affectionate, tone.

"I wished to write to you, but Antoine foiled my doing so. He told me it is useless to worry you —."

"As I was not in a position to assist you, eh? I recognise your husband's efficacy of feeling, and he had, indeed, every reason to think that a poor, country priest could not have much money at his disposal. He was not far wrong; for, during the last thirty years, I have not practised economy. I have my money at the command of the poor. But, fortunately, I know some people who are both rich and generous, and who will be thankful for the opportunity of performing a kind action."

"What?" exclaimed the workman's wife, blushing with emotion, "You might be able to find someone who —; but no, it is impossible. We owe so much; so little time now remains to us —."

"Who knows? Go on with your story."

"Well, three months ago Antoine bought some wood on credit. At that time he was in a fair way of business; he had orders to execute—bills to be paid, but then the war came. Those who owed us money did not pay, and bills came in as thick as hail, and creditors would not wait to be paid. Then Antoine borrowed from a money-lender, at high interest, but he hoped the war would soon be over, and that trade would revive. However, everything is gone from bad to worse, and now we are dreadfully in debt, and haven't a copper to pay with. Besides, expenses have doubled the original debt; and if at the end of the month we haven't collected four thousand, seven hundred and odd francs, it will be all over with us."

"But the end of the month is the day after to-morrow."

"Yes; and between now and then where can we possibly find so much money? If our creditor only had a little heart; but no, he is the hardest-hearted man in the world. He is well known in the faubourg, where he has ruined a number of poor folks already."

"Never mind, my dear lady, Tell me his name, and his address, and I will —"

"There he is," said Louise Cormier, pointing towards the door, which separated the shop from the back room in which the priest had been received on the occasion of his first visit with Marcel. "Antoine is with him—with them, I should say—for the money lender brings his partner with him. My husband is begging them to give him time, and I know that they are refusing to do so. There! Just listen!"

She was silent for a minute, and some voices were heard talking. Evidently the debtor and his creditors were at variance. Indeed, almost immediately, the door was thrown open; and M. Jean found himself face to face, with two persons whom he knew very well indeed, by sight.

The first was M. Vétillet, the assessor of the mayor of Charly-sous-bois, and a retired merchant; at least, that was how he styled himself on his visiting cards. He might, however, have suppressed the word "retired," for he was still on active service; and had merely changed the nature of the merchandize in which he dealt. It had once been hosiery, whereas now it was money. It is true that his acquaintances at Charly were ignorant of this, for he only exercised his profession as an usurer in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, where he went by the name of "Father Chafonin," and where he was able to fleece people, without compromising his municipal dignity. Beyond the fortifications he became Assessor and Monsieur Vétillet again, forsooth a very important personage.

The priest, who had certainly never suspected that the retired hosiery practised usury in Paris, and went by an alias so as to conceal his identity, the priest drew back with surprise on seeing him. By doing so, he made way for a second individual, who followed closely at Vétillet's heels, and who, of course, was the partner, that Louise Cormier had just mentioned. M. Jean's stupefaction was boundless, when he saw that this personage was none other than Digonnard, the democrat, who held forth so eloquently against the men of wealth who grew fat on the sweat of the people.

The two confederates, greatly astonished on perceiving the village priest, looked at him mistrustfully, and seemed to be asking themselves whether their debtor had not laid a trap for them by bringing them face to face with the curé of Charly. Cormier, red with anger, and his wife, pale with emotion, completed the picture.

The chemist, who was a man of some resolution, wished to get out of the business by making off. He roughly pushed his acolyte Vétillet, who was not walking fast enough, and the well-matched partners would, doubtless, have escaped any explanation, had not their victim loudly called out:

"Ah, your reverence, you have come just in the nick of time, and if you have never seen 'short time' money-lenders before you may take a good look at these gentlemen."

M. Jean was still inclined to doubt the rascality of his two parishioners, but the furious workman was in such a state of indignation, that he really "*dotted his i's*," as the saying goes; and the priest had to yield to evidence. Louise looked imploringly at her husband, Vétillet scratched his nose energetically, and Digonnard intended to be letting on to his great-coat, as if he wished to wrap himself in his virtue, light as such clothing might be.

"I must introduce you to old Father Chafonin," continued Cormier; "an honourable money-lender, who lent me three thousand francs at five per cent.—per month, remember—and who is going to sell me up if by the day after to-morrow I don't pay him capital, interest, and law expenses."

"Oh, sir," murmured the priest, turning towards the mayor's assessor, "you will never do that, for you would not have it said in the neighbourhood——"

"And this one," continued the workman, brimming over with indignation, "is the kind friend who shares the loaf with old Chafonin, and makes the round of all the cafés in the faubourg every Monday, preaching equality and fraternity——"

"And I am proud of doing so," said Digonnard impudently; "but I don't

how our affairs concern this gentleman. Besides, if you have fetched him here to intimidate my partner and myself, I am happy to tell you that you have failed in your intention, for we don't at all trouble ourselves as to the opinions of the clergy."

"No, we don't trouble ourselves in the least," insisted Vétillot, who took courage on seeing that his comrade showed fight.

"Perhaps the opinion of your fellow-townsmen at Charly will affect you more nearly," said M. Jean gently.

"What? these money-grabbers come from Charly?" exclaimed the workman.

"Yes, this gentleman is the assessor to the mayor, and that gentleman is the chemist who lives in the High Street, not far from Jacquelin's house," said the vicar somewhat maliciously.

"Ah, I wish I had only known it. I would have trumpeted it well at old Chaufoux's, when I went to see the little shop there; but that is not the least fear of the gentlemen giving their red dresses to those they fleece. To think that I took them merely for ordinary sharpers!"

"Antoine, I beg of you," urged Louise.

"All right! Now that I know them, all the faubourg shall learn this evening that old Chaufoux and his pal are respected suburban shopkeepers; they will ruin me and my wife and the boys, but as soon as I've earned a little cash I shall go and set up as a cabinet-maker at Charly, and tell all the village the story. I will jolly well make them pay for it!"

"I don't care a fig," muttered Digonnard, who tried to put a bold face on the matter, "I have a clear conscience."

"Yes, we have a clear conscience," echoed Vétillot.

"Yes! let us talk about your conscience, it evidently did not prevent your practising usury."

"It isn't prohibited, I fancy, to make something out of one's capital," said the chemist.

"It is the most legitimate thing in the world," added the assessor.

"Legitimate! at sixty per cent. per annum. That is coming it hot!"

"Money is merchandise, my worthy friend, and if you had the least notion of political economy, I could prove to you——"

"Nonsense! go and tell that in the drinking shops of the neighbourhood, where you jaw every week about the tyranny of hateful capitalists."

"I don't share on this point the opinions of Proudhon, whom I otherwise respect," so Digonnard gravely declared.

"Nor I either," squeaked Vétillot, who was quite ignorant as to whom Proudhon might be. Perhaps he thought that the great apostle of French socialism was some legal practitioner.

"And to think you call yourself a regular democrat!" cried Cormier, becoming more and more exasperated, "to think that you go about proclaiming that the social position of the working class ought to be improved! Ah! confound it, if I did not respect his reverence's presence here, [—]"

"Compose yourself, I entreat you, my dear friend," said the priest, placing his hand on Cormier's arm, which had been raised as if to strike the dissentient Proudhonian, "compose yourself, and leave me to settle the affair with these gentlemen."

"You are right, they are not worth punching, and I want to spare you any annoyance, but let them be off at once, or else——"

"Very good, we are going off, but we are not a bit afraid of you," retorted Digonnard, after having prudently retreated in the direction of the yard.

"We fear nobody, and you will hear of us again," echoed Vétillet who had executed the same manœuvre.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," began M. Jean, "but before you leave I wish to arrange —"

"There is nothing to arrange," interrupted the chemist roughly; "the debt amounts to 4713 francs and 75 centimes, and as I don't imagine that you mean to pay it —"

"You are mistaken, sir! Such is my exact intention," said the priest of Charly composedly.

"Ah! bah! what! you mean to — Yes, only it isn't merely a question as to whether you *mean* to do so, but whether you *can* do so."

"The amount will be paid to you on the day after to-morrow."

"What guarantees shall we have of that!" asked Vétillet sharply.

"My promise, sir," replied M. Jean simply.

The two cronies exchanged glances, as if to sound each other. In reality, they had no wish to quarrel with the priest, for they both cared for public opinion at Charly, and they quite realised that it depended merely on M. Jean to destroy their reputation in the village.

"That is another matter," muttered Digonnard, "and if my partner is willing —"

"I am quite willing to grant the delay that his reverence desires," Vétillet immediately replied. "The more willingly as we cannot sell up here sooner" was his mental reservation.

"I am obliged to you, gentlemen," said M. Jean; "and I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again on the day after to-morrow before noon."

This was a polite way of asking them to retire, and as they did not care to linger within reach of Antoine Cornier's pugnacious fists, they speedily left the place. "Where will he get the money to pay us with, and *will* he pay us?" asked Vétillet of Digonnard, as they crossed the yard.

"Oh! he will pay right enough," answered the chemist, "and he'll manage it easily. All these fellows of the cloth are rolling in wealth. I'll bet that this one has got his hands on some old devotee's inheritance."

Whilst these honourable personages were on their way up the street, the good priest had to contend with Louise's expressions of gratitude, and Antoine's obstinacy in refusing the proffered help. "No," said the cabinetmaker, "no, I do not see why you should have to pinch yourself for us—pray don't trouble yourself—we will work hard—a man may have a tumble, but he picks himself up again—however, we are none the less grateful to you."

"You owe me no gratitude, my friend," interrupted M. Jean, "and you may accept this little service without the least scruple. The person who will hand me this sum to get you out of your embarrassment won't give it to you, he will lend it, and I am certain you will pay him back again, some day or other."

"If I thought it were really so—if I could feel sure you would not be pinching yourself for me —"

"I can assure you that I have spoken truly, my friend."

"Then, I accept!" exclaimed Cornier, shaking the priest's hand warmly.

"Thank you, in my children's name," murmured Louise.

"And now," continued the priest, "I must leave you, for I am expected at Charly, and I carry good news with me. I have just seen the poor woman, in whom we are all so interested, and she has told me something, which will, perhaps, enable me to reconcile her with her husband. You have nothing further to fear from those bad men. I can, therefore, leave you. I have not lost my time to-day."

IX.

that same day, the last but one of the month of August while M. Jean coming to an explanation with Antoine Cormier's creditors Julien de la Terrie took, with Dr. Minard's permission, his first airing in the Park of Steneuil. His arm which had been so badly damaged by Miraut de Saint-tin's sword, his arm freed at last from all kind of bandages, was now fully serviceable, and he made use of it to pick some flowers for Marie.

Not that Mademoiselle de Brannes was present to witness the efforts of the adolescent. Her father had taken her off that morning to Paris, where he been summoned by the sad necessities of that eventful war.

Since the beginning of the campaign, fortune had set in so decidedly against French, that the prospect of a siege of Paris was already being discussed, the count, who was firmly determined not to fly on the enemy's approach, various arrangements to make at his mansion on the Quai d'Orsay, where he meant to take up his residence should the Germans invest Paris. However on this occasion, the principal object of his visit to the capital was to inquire at the War Office for news concerning the movements of the army.

Henri de Brannes, his only son, had, fortunately for him, not been employed on the staff of the frontier force, known as the Army of the Rhine, a piece of which the young captain had considered to be the greatest possible misfortune. Whilst most of his comrades were fighting at Reichshoffen and Collette, he had remained with a reserve corps, which had started very late in the day for the camp of Châlons. However, after the disastrous issue of the battles fought round Metz, this corps at last received its marching-orders, and it was known that for several days past, it had been moving towards the North-East of France.

That Frenchman does not remember that awful week, when men met each other with anxious looks, when mothers opened the newspapers with anguish? Was certainly the most terrible week of that awful month, each Sunday of which brought Paris the news of a fresh defeat.

Although Julien's sufferings were not of the same nature as those which had fallen to the share of his uncle, they were none the less cruel. Confinement more than forty days to his bed, as Doctor Minard had predicted, the poor boy caused the fatality, which prevented his setting out with the Mobile Guard and longed to be able to join it.

It would be rash to say that his charming cousin's presence had not alleviated his regrets, still, all the same, as the situation grew worse and worse Julien grew maddened at being reduced to inaction. The hope of fighting for his country had returned to him ever since his wound had begun to heal; but just at that moment the 7th battalion, to which he belonged, received orders to return to Paris; and he was obliged to await its advent there in miserable inaction.

Marie, to tell the truth, did not complain of this delay, although, like a true girl, she had sufficient strength of mind not to try and turn Julien from his path of duty. Her brother was already on active service, and her betrothed would shortly find himself under arms. She gazed to Providence for aid, and France, sacrificing, without complaint, her dearest affections to her country; whilst citizens Digeonard and Verille profited by the general fortunes to make their money yield a yet higher rate of interest.

Unlike these gentlemen, La Chauterie was so greatly preoccupied by the

reverses of the French army, that he hardly gave any further thought to the poacher's case. Even M. Wassmann and his very equivocal conduct, had escaped from his memory. He spent the greater part of his time in reassuring his uncle and cousin, and the remainder in feverishly counting the newspapers in which he seldom found anything but nonsense.

On the evening of his first airing, while walking about the garden, he perused a paper, which tried to prove, with admirable gravity, that as the Prussians were born in a flat country their feet were not suited to long marches; that they would be quite worn out after about thirty halts, and be totally annihilated as soon as they made their appearance on the "Catalaunical fields," as journalists then gushingly called the plains of the Champagne, where Attila's hordes were exterminated in by-gone ages. Many readers, alas! on the eve of the final catastrophe, still lent a willing ear to these idiotic fallacies, but Julien, who had no belief in the Catalaunical fields, shrugged his shoulders, and was throwing down the paper in disgust, when he suddenly saw the curé of of Charly approaching him along the wide garden walk. Somewhat surprised at receiving a visit from M. Jean, at a time of day when he was not in the habit of calling—Julien went forward to meet him. He feared that something was amiss, and indeed, at that time, one lived from day to day in expectation of bad news.

"I have just come from Paris," said M. Jean, after shaking hands with Julien, "and I come to tell you——"

"Has my uncle learnt any fresh bad news at the War Office?" asked Julien.

"Not that I am aware of. I have not had the honour of meeting the count, but I heard, on the contrary, that the last de-patches were good ones. It is asserted that a great battle is imminent, but everyone is full of hope, and perhaps, at this very moment, the safety of France is being decided."

"God grant it! France has great need of his protection; but you have something to tell me——"

"I wanted to speak to you about the poacher's wife. Her misfortunes interest me greatly, in spite of all these disasters."

"And I quite reproach myself with having thought so little of her during these past weeks. How is her husband's case progressing?"

"It is in just the same state as before, I believe, and nothing seems to indicate that the trial is approaching. Besides, the delay in sending him to the Assizes is to his advantage, for his conviction is only too probable——"

"I myself can't see how he can escape now that M. Wassmann's innocence is fully proved—for it is, is it not?"

"Completely so, as far as I can see. The conduct of my neighbour has lately been quite above suspicion; I am particularly touched by his liberality towards my pupil Marcel and by the great sympathy he shows for our dear country, though it is not his own native land."

"Yes; people have told me that he has done a great deal for the child and showed marked hostility to Prussia. Many curious things influenced me against him, but I am beginning to lose my prejudices. Excuse me, however, I have again interrupted you—you were saying that Robert's wife——"

"She has at last confided her full story to me. I now know the reason of her husband's unjust enmity, and I have the means of reconciling them within my grasp. Perhaps the very documents she has provided me with may serve to soften her judges."

"What information?" asked Julien, somewhat surprised.

"The certificate of the birth of a boy who was placed some years ago in

Foundling Hospital, and who is a son of Robert's, together with some papers containing proofs of the child's identity. I should have gone straight to the hospital had I not been recalled here by my ecclesiastical duties; to-morrow I shall return to Paris and——"

"Excuse me, your reverence, but I don't quite understand what connection there can be——"

"You are right, I am talking foolishly and forget that I had not explained matters to you. But it is a most romantic story, and I can tell it you more fully by showing you these papers," said M. Jean, taking his pocket-book and drawing out the packet which had been given him by Eugénie.

Julien watched him with mingled curiosity and surprise.

"Here is the certificate of birth," continued the priest, "let's see 'Municipal Registry Offices of the Twelfth Arrondissement, a child of the male sex, born in Paris, 27th October, 1857, father and mother unknown; given name of——Marcel.'"

"Marcel!" repeated M. Jean, "it is a most singular coincidence."

"Why, it is your pupil's certificate of birth," exclaimed Julien. "Jacqueline Ledoux had a similar certificate given her by the Hospital. She showed it to me the other day, and I perfectly well remember that the date of birth was the same, and the names of the witnesses also. There is no longer the least doubt but what Marcel is Robert's son."

"Ah! good Heavens! Then the poor child has a criminal for his father, a man whom the law is about to condemn to——"

M. Jean stopped short, for the count's valet had just appeared on the terrace; and now came forward so fast that he must be bringing some very urgent news.

"What is the matter, Joseph?" asked M. de la Chanterie.

"His reverence is wanted for some one who is dying," said the servant, "the messenger came from Madame Ledoux."

"Madame Ledoux! Why, I saw her this morning in perfect health."

"It is her neighbour, Mademoiselle Rose, the lady who keeps the café. She is dying and has asked for a priest."

"Dying! God grant that I may reach her in time," exclaimed M. Jean.

"I will go with you, your reverence!" said Julien.

"What, my dear boy, you wish to be present at so sad a time?" said M. Jean, "you yourself are only just convalescent?"

"Oh! I am well enough to go with you, and besides this news seems extraordinary to me—the dying woman is that Mademoiselle Rose, whose evidence was so decisive—she was not at all ill—who knows whether remorse——"

"Your imagination leads you too far. This poor woman has had nervous attacks for some time past, and it is quite possible that her condition has been aggravated by this business; still as you wish to accompany me, let us set out at once, please."

M. de la Chanterie followed the priest, who walked quickly towards the garden-gate. Just as they reached it, there passed along the road a very stylish dog-cart, drawn by a splendid trotter, which went like lightning, and which was driven by M. Wassmann in person.

"Where is he off to?" Julien wondered, full of vague suspicion as to the German's destination; "This isn't the time for his usual drive, one would think he was taking himself off the way."

The young fellow kept these venturesome speculations to himself, and, as the good priest, who was collecting his thoughts for the exercise of his holy office, did not appear to have seen the vehicle, no mention of M. Wassmann

was made. Besides, it was not far from the château to Mademoiselle Rose's café, and in a few minutes they reached the Grand Vainqueur, where a group of gossips stood in front of the doorway. Jacqueline Leboux was on the threshold, and seeing M. Jean from afar, she began to gesticulate, and to call out to the inquisitive chatterers to make way for him.

"What has happened?" asked the priest.

"Ah! sir," lamented the good woman, "it was almost like a thunder-stroke—she had her usual attack yesterday at nine o'clock—her nerves always came on at that time—but to day she was wonderfully well; and then all of a sudden she turned quite green; cramps came on—almost like cholera—and now the doctor says she may go off at any moment."

"Monsieur Minard is here, then?"

"To be sure he is. I sent for him at once, and he has been drugging her for a whole hour, but it does not do the poor creature the least good."

"And she expressed a wish to see me?"

"Twenty minutes ago, she spoke of confessing herself. Ah, she realises very well she is about to die."

"Take me to her," said M. Jean quickly.

"Ah! it isn't far. Her room is behind the counter."

Thereupon the market-gar vender's wife hastily led the priest across the café, where the celebrated games of dominos were played every evening by the no less celebrated magnates of Charly.

The daylight was waning, and the Café du Grand Vainqueur, usually so noisy and brilliantly illuminated, presented a most melancholy appearance. Not a single customer sat on the stools upholstered in Utrecht velvet, nor a single player stood at the billiard-table. Julien, who had never been in the café before, looked curiously at this deserted room, where the silence was only broken by the monotonous tic-tac of the clock pendulum. He followed the priest, whom Jacqueline led into the bedroom, and there beheld a mournful sight.

On a bed which had not been turned down, the unhappy Rose was writhing in terrible convulsions. The doctor, standing at the bedside, was trying to make her swallow a few drops of a narcotic potion, and could not succeed in doing so, for her jaws were firmly clouched. The landlady was no longer recognisable; death had already set its mark on her livid face. Her eyes alone seemed alive. They sparkled brilliantly when the dying woman saw the priest, and she even extended her hands towards him, as if to entreat something of him; then a rattling sound came from her chest; she tried to sit up on the bed, but fell back again, overcome by agony.

The doctor turned round, and seeing M. Jean, he left the bedside with a haste which seemed to imply, "Science can do no more for this poor woman, and if religion can soften her last moments, the time has come for you to exhort her to die bravely." The priest understood the doctor's gesture, and quickly approached the bedside.

"You have sent for me, mademoiselle?" he said, leaning towards the dying woman.

"Yes," answered Rose in a stifling voice; "I wished to—yes, I wished to tell you—confess to you——"

"I am ready to hear your confession. Speak."

"Yes, I will try; it is something that seems to choke me—and—it seems as if I should feel comforted—when you have listened to me——"

Julien and M. Minard understood, and retired to the other end of the room. Jacqueline had not dared to go beyond the door.

"What is the matter with her, doctor?" asked the young advocate in a low

"I can't tell as yet, but it is certainly all up with her."

"What! you have given up all hope?"

"I have tried the most energetic remedies, but they were all quite powerless—in a few minutes, a fresh spasm will carry her off."

"It's inexplicable, and her symptoms are not those of fever."

"Certainly not."

"Then what causes them?"

"I don't like to say; it would be too serious."

"Poison, you think?"

"I repeat that I have not, and cannot have the least certainty,—a post-mortem examination alone could make me sure about it. However, the extraordinary phenomenon which I have witnessed for the last hour is such as could be produced by the administration of strychnine."

"Ah! my presentiments did not deceive me then. She has killed herself, she has murdered."

"I may add, that if, as everything inclines me to believe, we really have to do with strychnine, this substance must have been administered in a most fearful dose, for I have but rarely seen such a terrible effect produced by it."

"But you ought to have questioned this woman, and asked her —"

"No doubt. But unfortunately when I arrived, she was already too far gone to answer connectedly, and I almost doubt her being able to confess, —"

At this moment a piercing shriek, interrupted M. Minard. The sick woman, sitting upright, as if she had been galvanized by an electric shock, her hair bristled on her head, her eyes stared wildly towards the door, whilst her body was twisted by frightful convulsions. M. Jean was holding her up, the doctor ran forward to assist him in doing so. Julien, struck with horror, remained a distant spectator of this frightful scene. A moment of dead silence ensued. Nothing was heard but the ticking of the café clock, which continued to mark the last seconds of Rose's life. Suddenly, the sick woman tore herself away from the supporting arms around her, and falling forward, as if listening, she exclaimed in a voice which hissed as it came between her tightly clenched teeth: "Stop it! that noise is killing me — the clock — that I may die in peace — that noise — always that noise — God is punishing me —"

"God is merciful," murmured M. Jean, "offer him your repentance, and he will forgive your faults —"

"No, no — it is too late — to repair the wrong I have done — if I could speak — my strength fails me — I am choking."

The unhappy woman grew stiff in a final spasm, her eyes clouded, and the last rasp of breath came from her pallid lips.

"It is all over," said the doctor in a whisper, and he laid her head gently on the pillow.

The priest fell on his knees by the bed side and began to pray, whilst M. Minard drew Julien out of the room. Jacqueline hurried into the street, giving way to loud lamentations, which were taken up in chorus by all the gabled gossips.

"That's a strange death," said the doctor, looking at M. de la Chantrie.

"So strange that it seems indispensable to me to hold an inquest and inquire the cause of it," said Julien warmly.

"I mean to do so; but in these matters you can't shew too much prudence;

and, before pushing things too far, I think it will be best to collect some information. It is as well to know first of all whether it may have been a case of suicide."

"I don't in the least believe that it was."

"But a case of poisoning seems hard to explain. Nobody had any interest in ridding themselves of a woman who owned nothing excepting this modest establishment."

"Crimes are not always caused by cupidity," murmured Julien.

"Whatever it may be, I am going at once to the mayor's," answered the doctor, "to give notice of the death, and ask leave to perform a post-mortem examination; I shall also call at the chemist's, to know if he has made any error in making up my prescriptions. Digouard knows his business; but for some time past especially, he has worried his brain too much with politics, and he is quite capable of having made a blunder."

"You will oblige me greatly by informing me as to the result of your inquiries, my dear doctor."

"I will call at the *château* during the evening," said M. Minard; whereupon Julien warmly shook his hand, and then, in deep thought, remained waiting for M. Jean, who was praying for the soul of the dead woman.

X.

IN those troublous times, the living had no leisure to occupy themselves with the dead, and the sad end of the landlady of the Grand Vainqueur did not make much of a stir in Charly. Rose was only regretted by her neighbour, Jacqueline Ledoux. At any other time no doubt the faithful customers of the café, which she kept so well, would have spared a tear for her memory, as her sudden death would have deprived them of their daily games of dominoes; but these gentlemen for the time being had something besides dominoes to think about.

The disaster of Sedan, followed by a Revolution, had burst upon France, and the four cronies were on their way to higher destinies.

Digouard was busy organising a club at Charly, and anticipated that he would be elected as a representative of the people. Vétillet was canvassing for the mayoralty, although he had been nominated assessor by the late government, while Cruchot the vet. was contracting to supply the government with horses, and the huisier Verduron petitioned to be appointed a justice of the peace. As to the worthy people of the place who did not wish to enrich themselves by their country's disasters, they were simply terrified, and they had no inclination to worry over private misfortunes.

The doctor had sent in his report, in which it was set forth, as had been supposed, that Maloncelle Rose Jourdain had succumbed to poisoning by strychnine. However, he had not been able to ascertain whence the strychnine had come. The chemist had said none; his books bore witness to the fact. M. Minard concluded that death was the result of suicide, and his conclusions were readily accepted by the public prosecutor, who was but little inclined to start any criminal inquiries. The priest shared in the doctor's opinion, and was not far from thinking that remorse at having committed some misdeed or other had prompted the unhappy woman to destroy herself. However, as everything went to prove that M. Wassmann was no ways implicated in the keeper's murder, he did not at all suspect the deceased woman of perjury. Besides, immediately after Rose's death, he found herself very busy.

ished above everything to get Charley out of the usurers' clutches, and succeeded in doing so. M. de Franques lent the sum that was required and the cabinetmaker was able to satisfy the suburban vultures.

Jean had yet another good work to perform, that of reconciling the father with his wife; but various complications arose in this direction. Marcel was Robert's son, and this unexpected discovery greatly modified the situation. Agreeing in this respect with M. de la Chauxerrie, the curé thought it to keep silent for the present respecting the boy's parentage, or at any rate to trust to the subject to the Indians, who would have told the story over the village. And indeed, it as everything seemed to indicate, the curé was convinced and convinced it was as well that the parentage of the little fault-finding son should remain a secret. M. de la Chauxerrie intended to take Marcel to Paris, so that he could visit his mother, and then, after this decisive test, sit the prisoner, tell him the truth, and believe him to see his wife. He wished to let his wife do everything in her power, to tell him all that had happened to Charley of late, including the tragical demise of the unfortunate Jean Rose.

Jean, however, failed to take military and political events into account. During the thirty days which preceded the 4th September, he was kept at home, and so, naturally, could not see André Cornier the money-lender. During the following days, there was no hope of his finding the magistrate to whom he had been referred, and all business in Paris was ended in consequence of the attack by the enemy; even the course of the war intervened, and ended in a complete stalemate. France seemed to be agonising, and it was not surprising that the public mind was in favour of a culprit who did not expect to be shot. M. de la Chauxerrie abstained from making any attempt in this direction, and he was in the right.

Jean himself took no further step; indeed, he was utterly absorbed by his own grief. His uncle and cousin had left Chauxerrie, and taken up their abode at their Paris mansion. A few days after the battle of Sedan, Henri Franques arrived, wounded by falling wounded in his arm and his head, in almost a dying condition. The valiant captain had succeeded in doing the work of the German lines, and joining Vinoy's corps, which was fighting for the defence of Paris; more lucky than many another man, and succeeded in saving his father and sister once more, but the doctors had only a few days of saving his life. Julien, who was deeply attached to his uncle, spent his nights watching by his bed-side, and his days in travelling backwards and forwards on the Vincennes railway line, for he had undertaken to remove all objects of value from the château. The count had a great quantity of precious objects stored in his castle's residence, and he wished to save them from being looted. But little time was left for the curé, who was rapidly becoming old besides, Julien hastened the more, as he longed to join his father, which was then encamped near by.

On September 15, he set out for Chauxerrie, fully expecting that this would be his last trip to the village. The army of the Crown Prince of Prussia was but a few marches distant, and there was a rumour that Uhlans had already been on the plain of Villiers.

The young lawyer had already donned his uniform as a *Garde Mobile*, and went to profit by this last excursion, to make a short military reconnaissance in the neighbourhood of the village. He wished to see at what point the enemy, before it was overrun by the Germans, so as to see at what points they could be most easily surprised when they were encamped there. Charley happened to be situated exactly on the borders of the zone, protected by the

fire of the outlying forts, and everything seemed to show that a good deal of outpost skirmishing would take place in the vicinity.

Julien had communicated his plan to his friends, Fabrègue and Du Tremblay, who were serving in a corps of *Frances Tireurs*, and he had given them an appointment at the château so that they might explore the country with him. He had no doubt but what later on they would make some night expeditions, in which he trusted he might at times be able to join them.

On the previous evening he had sent to Paris a final consignment of things of value from the château, and it now only remained for him to give his parting orders to the two keepers left in charge of the property. He expected to get through this business quickly, and in the afternoon he meant to explore the surrounding country with his comrades.

On arriving on the château, he was agreeably surprised to meet M. Jean, who having been warned that Julien would call that day, had determined to have a chat with him. They exchanged cordial greetings, and then began to discuss the news of the day, both from a general and personal point of view. Julien told the priest that Paris was prepared for a desperate resistance, and that his unfortunate cousin Henri was lying between life and death. The curé on his side told Julien that the Prussian scouts had already passed Emerainville, and might at any moment appear on the banks of the Marne. Then he began to speak of Marcel, and the poacher's case.

"What will become of the unhappy man?" sighed M. Jean. "There is every probability that no juries will be called during the siege. He will remain in prison ever so long before being tried, and really I don't know what to do about this poor child, supposed to be his. I have not yet been able to make up my mind about seeing Robert since I learnt that——"

"How has Monsieur Wassmann been behaving of late?" interrupted La Chanterie with a frown. His suspicions had suddenly returned to him without his quite knowing why.

"He has behaved quite straightforwardly. He expressed great grief on hearing of our defeat at Sedan, and declared to several people of the neighbourhood, and to myself, that he should remain at Charly. It seems that a foreign legion is being formed, which is to be called the Legion of the Friends of France, and he means to enlist in it."

"Is he here now?" asked Julien.

"I think so, for I saw him pass by in his carriage yesterday. He was returning from Paris with his daughter. I was told just now, too, that he had been riding this morning along the banks of the Marne. He ought certainly to have returned home by now."

"Oh! I have not the least wish to pay him a visit, and if I inquire as to his doings, it is because I can't get rid of the thought that he is a traitor."

"Don't forget, my dear boy, that you also thought that he was Michel's murderer."

"It is not yet clearly proved to me that I was wrong, and with this thought in mind, I think that I had better trust you afresh with the two halves of the letter, which may some day serve to clear up the mystery. I always carry them upon my person, and if I happened to be killed, God knows into whose hands they would fall."

"You will not be killed, I am sure I hope not, but—but what does that child want, who is standing before the gate making signs to us?"

The curé and Julien were chatting in the court-yard of the château, and a few paces in front of them, standing in the road, there was a dirty little

yellow in rags, beckoning to them. Much surprised at the pantomime which was being enacted, they went towards him.

"Do you *be* the officer?" asked the ragamuffin of La Chénierie.

"What officer?"

"The gentleman in uniform who's arrived at the château."

"Yes, what do you want with the gentleman in uniform?"

"To give him this," saying the child held out a letter, and as soon as the officer took it hurried off as quickly as he could.

"What does this mean?" muttered Julien, who turned and turned the letter, which the ragged messenger had almost thrust into his hands.

"I don't know the child," said the priest; he does not belong to Charly; no doubt he is some beggar boy, whom the person writing to you met on the highway."

"Yes, but who is the person?"

"You will ascertain that by opening the letter."

"Have I a right to open it? Nothing proves that it is meant for me."

"What?"

"No; look, there is no name on the envelope."

"True. Really it is a curious way to correspond. But on reflection it seems to me that this letter can only be for you. Do you remember what the ragged said? 'The gentleman in uniform who has arrived at the château; that is certainly you, and nobody else.'"

"I believe you are right, and so much the worse for the writer, if the boy has made a blunder. I am not responsible for his errors; and if there is any indiscretion on my part in opening this note, you are a witness, your reverence, that the indiscretion is involuntary."

Having thus calmed his scruples, M. de la Chénierie tore open the envelope, and he felt he glanced at the letter he obtained, then his face expressed the warmest surprise. M. Julien, who was watching him with a keen curiosity, saw him quickly unbutton his uniform overcoat, and draw from its depths a pocket-book, whence he took a paper which he began to examine most carefully.

"Just see," he added at last, "it is the same writing;" and, so saying, he played side by side the note which he had just received, and the one which had served to ram down the charge of the murderer's gun.

"Ah!" said the priest, "Providence has at length come to our aid, and we all now know ——"

"Perhaps; but there is no signature."

"That is funny; but to whom is the letter written?"

"Impossible to tell, there is no 'sir,' or 'dear friend,' or any other formula."

"At any rate the sense must tell us ——"

"I hope so. Listen," said Julien, and he read as follows:—"Since you left, I am without any news of you. What has become of you in the midst of these terrible events? I do not know whether you have returned. I do not even know if you are still alive. Everything is hidden from me. I never go out alone, I am forbidden to speak to anyone whatever. The people about me are paid to spy on me; I am a prisoner and undergo the torture of a thousand deaths. When will my martyrdom end? Soon doubtless, for he wants to take me far away from here, and I have determined to take my life rather than quit this country without seeing you again. This man is a scoundrel, and the sight of him is odious to me. You often told me that you loved me. If you are sincere when you said it, come I beg of you, come to the hole in the gate at the end of the garden, below the slope and near the river, there where I spoke to you for the first time, as you went by on horseback. I am kept shut

up, but I can walk about my prison, and, unknown to him, I have kept a key to this little gate. I know not when or how I shall manage to send you this letter, for I am closely watched, but I write so as to be ready to profit by a chance which may perhaps never occur. Come as soon as you receive it, if you ever do receive it. One hour after sunset I go to this gate and listen, I always hope to hear the sound of your footsteps. I shall wait for you thus every evening until the middle of the month now begun. He has fixed our departure for then; but come what may he will depart alone. Come, I beg of you, before it be too late."

"What! is that all?" asked M. Jean.

"No, there is a postscript: 'From the window of the pavilion I have just heard two workmen say, as they passed along the road, that an officer in uniform had just arrived at the château. God be praised! You still live. A beggar is here now; I am going to throw him a piece of gold and my letter, and beg him to run to the château. If you have not forgotten me, come this night, for it is perhaps the last that I may yet be allowed to hope.'"

"The concluding lines are hastily written, and the ink is quite fresh," said the priest, leaning forward to examine the letter more closely; "still I don't understand anything more of it from that."

"I understand it," exclaimed Julien, whom this letter had thrown into a great state of agitation.

"At any rate, this singular message was not meant for you."

"No. It was meant for my cousin, Henri de Brannes."

"What makes you think so?"

"It speaks of the dangers he had undergone, and of not knowing whether he has survived the events of the war. The man in uniform, who had just arrived at the château, is myself, whom the workmen mistook for an officer. She thought it was Henri."

"She! who is she?"

"Ah! it's true! You do not know about it. Henri was much smitten by Monsieur Wassmann's daughter."

"What! could it be she——"

"Yes; she alone can have written that letter. She saw him on the evening before his departure for the army, and, since the battle of Sedan, has heard nothing more about him. 'Everything is hidden from me,' she says so. She is not aware that he is in Paris seriously wounded, and unable to come here, and she makes a last effort to see him again."

"But if that young girl wrote that, how do you explain the other letter, which was used to ram down the murderer's gun?"

"The murderer! What, do you doubt any longer but what it was that scoundrel, Wassmann?"

"I own the coincidence seems to prove it, and yet what contradictions still exist! The writing is the same, but not the composition. Read the torn letter again—it certainly is not that of a daughter to her father. To prove this, note merely the first line: 'Since I have left all to follow thee.'"

"And how can we be sure that this unhappy girl is Wassmann's daughter? I myself think that she is some poor creature whom he seduced somewhere, perhaps in Alsace—she spoke of Alsace, remember—and whom he has dragged about with him to further his abominable plans."

"But—what plans?"

"What! Don't you see that this man is a Prussian spy?"

"Impossible! He was in the Austrian service."

"That was a lie! Do not you remember the information obtained about

a from the Austrian embassy? They were unacquainted there with the called Major Wassmann. Ah! I now see clearly into all his infamy! Here! and this sentence from the torn letter: 'To get rid of that keeper who may be seen thee formerly in Alsace'—the keeper, in question, was Michel Astein, born at Colmar, where he had no doubt met this rascal Wassmann, at a time when the scamp did not conceal his real nationality. Wassmann hated him because he knew that he had been recognised and feared to be denounced. And in another place: 'If thou didst really love me thou wouldst command me——this loyal young man——to attract him here to extort from him——.' I can now fill up the gaps burnt by the powder. The loyal young man is Henri, and what they wanted to extort from him was certain secret information about the war plans. He had been attached to the War Office, remember; and Wassmann relied on this woman's 'allowing him to believe that she was free'—see, it's written. He thought she could make the wing staff-captain fall in love with her, and that through her he would learn everything."

"But this letter is subsequent to Michel's death, for at the time he was killed there was no question of a quarrel with Prussia."

"Prussia has never ceased sending spies here for years past; and besides it is especially after war was declared that this man showed especial attentions to Henri. You will, perhaps, tell me that, in these two letters, Wassmann's called daughter shows very different sentiments towards my cousin: that in the first she resists the idea of seeing him, and begs this Prussian to leave France with her; whilst in the second one she makes a great show of her affection for Henri, and proposes to leave Wassmann to follow him. Well, that proves that she has been quite smitten by a handsome young officer whom she once saw; for until Henri left for the camp at Châlons he never failed a single day to call at the Pavillon des Sorbiers; and, look here, speaking of the pavilion, if you have any further doubts, just read the end of the note: 'From the window of the pavilion,' she says, 'I have just heard two workmen as they passed along,' and then, 'the little iron gate at the end of the garden, below the slope.' You know it well; it is the one communicating with the towing-path, and it is, doubtless, the one by which the murderer slipped out to go and lie in ambush for Michel in the Bêlière woods, and by it he, moreover, returned home after he had killed the poor fellow."

"Yes," muttered M. Jean; "all that seems very probable, but there are so many strange points in the story—in fact, my head grows giddy in the midst of all these abominable complications. I can't believe in such a display of duplicity; if this man were really a Prussian, how does he dare to remain here now, when his compatriots are within a march of Charly?"

"Don't you see that he remains here on purpose to guide them, to show them the best points for crossing the river? Don't you remember how contently he made sketches on the banks of the Marne? You may be certain that those pretended landscapes were plans. And, now think over the sentence, 'until the middle of the month now begun.' That must have been written during the early days of September. 'He has fixed our departure for then.' Is it all clear to you now? He calculated that on or about the 15th the Prussians would be before Paris. That night, or the following night, he meant to join them with the three or four rogues, his servants, who are really nothing more than spies of a lower order."

"It seems to me," said the priest, "that you are rather venturesome as regards your conjectures; but even supposing they are correct, what is to be done?"

"You ask such a thing as that?" cried Julien. "Why, we must at once go and arrest Monsieur Wassmann and his servants and everyone else whom we find at the Pavillon des Sorbiers."

"Arrest them—by virtue of whose orders?"

"We are at war, the enemy will be here to-morrow; I can do without orders to seize a Prussian spy. If need were, the mayor would give me an authorization to requisition the gendarmes——"

"Hum! I don't advise you to go to the mayor. I know him. Vétillet is totally wanting in energy."

"Ah! well, I shall only have to beat up recruits as I go along. When it is known what Monsieur Wassmann has been doing here everyone in Charly will be ready to give me a helping hand."

"You surely don't think of such a thing, my dear boy."

"Why not?"

"What, you want to stir up a riot and send a horde of furious men to attack the pavilion—men quite beside themselves with passion, who will perhaps make the affair a pretext for robbery and arson? Believe me, these are not times to raise the fury of the masses."

"I know it; but I also know that this scoundrel will escape us if we don't make haste, and I want to catch him were it only to make him own that he killed poor Michel, and to secure the release of that unhappy poscher, the father of your dear pupil Marcel."

"I greatly doubt the efficacy of the means you propose, for violence injures the best of causes; but, whatever comes of it, I shall intercede with you on behalf of the poor woman, who, without intending it, it is true, has just sent us this valuable warning. If you carried out your plan, she would certainly be arrested, like the other inhabitants of the pavilion, and ill-treated perhaps; which would be a singular way, as you will agree, of rewarding her for the service she has rendered us. Besides, just think what your cousin Captain de Brannes will say when he has recovered. Will he be glad to learn that the woman he loved ——"

"You are right, your reverence," said Julien, warmly; "it is above all necessary to avoid compromising Henri. I will act alone."

"How?"

"I shall go this evening, one hour after sunset, to the little iron gate. I shall there find Wassmann's so called daughter. She will not fail to come there. I am in uniform. She will take me for my cousin; her messenger, as you know, was deceived about it. Well, I shall speak to her. I shall tell her who I am. I shall offer to take her under my protection if she will follow me. She will accept if only in the hopes of seeing Henri again. Then, as soon as she is in safety, I undertake to lay my hands on the traitor and murderer ——"

"What! this very night, and without anyone with you! You think of attacking this man in his own home, and among all his servants! It would be most imprudent, it would be risking your life rashly; and I entreat you to renounce this wild idea."

"I am expecting two friends who will accompany me, and the three of us together will be strong enough to manage Monsieur Wassmann and his valets. Moreover, I promise you that we will do nothing until we have got this unhappy woman out of his clutches, and then, if necessary, I shall fetch the sergeant of gendarmes. I know him, he has confidence in me and he will consent to help me by letting his men surround the pavilion."

"I persist in thinking, my dear boy, you would do better to leave it

ne," sighed M. Jean, who, however, knew his entreaties would be of no avail.

"My resolution is taken," said Julien calmly; and I am going to take a walk to-day, and to-morrow will make sure that our Prussians have not yet departed, and also to find out the exact number of the place. I shall return to give my friends with me a satisfactory answer by the four o'clock train. I shall tell them about the matter, and, as usual, you will set out. They are stalwart and respectable men. You may be sure that everything will go well."

The prisoners were all conversant with the situation, but Julien placed the two others in his hands, and left them to their fate for the morning, and then he set down his rifle and went to the Prussians' quarters. His abrupt departure did not surprise them, for M. Jean, who was greatly agitated and pained, was looking upon the departure of his young friend as an inevitable consequence of the situation, and he did not interfere. He at last yielded in the latter case, and then walked towards Ledoux's house where he might be seen and not shot at. It was his favorite recreation to chat with little, good-natured, old-fashioned servants in his company so frequently as during his few moments of leisure. The people and social sallies of his pupil made him forget the misdeeds of his country and the wickedness of mankind.

Meanwhile M. de la Courterie strode rapidly along the macadamized road, which crossed Charle from east to east, and speedily arrived in front of Julien Wascotte's residence. It was, as its name indicated, a charming villa built of brick, in the Louis XIII style, and surrounded by elegant serfs, covered with red berries. The front windows overlooked the road, and a verdant garden with a walled garden planted with trees—separated the main building from the stables.

Julien saw at a glance that the residents of this charming residence had not yet moved. M. Wascotte's coachman was in the middle of the yard, shining the horses, the wheels of which had so nearly crushed Marcel some months before. The valet, a huge fellow with whiskers even redder than his master's, was smoking a cigar on the threshold of the stable. There was nothing to indicate any preparations for departure.

Julien passed by without stopping. He did not wish to be recognised, and hardly dared raise his eyes to the windows. At the central one, however, he espied a seated woman, and realised that it was from there the letter had been thrown. The writer was still at the same place, motionless and dreamy, perhaps hoping she was about to see Henri de Brannes, hastening to warn her by a concerted signal, that he would be at the place of assignation that evening. However, Julien lowered his head and hurried past.

Before him there had stretched away in the distance, dusty and deserted till lost sight. To his right there was a surly shore which led to the towing-path. He started down it and followed the garden wall, which on this side did not appear to have any opening. Having made two-thirds of the descent, he reached the corner of the wall, turned round, and then, facing the river, he recognised the little iron gate mentioned in the letter. It was high, narrow, and strong. The lock seemed such as to resist all attempt at forcing.

"Happily, she has the key," thought Julien.

He completed his exploration by examining the wall parallel to the one that had appeared to him, ascertained that there was no place of egress on that side, and reached the chateau by crossing the strip of meadow land and the lière woods. This was the very route that the murderer must have taken. Fabrègue and Du Tremblay, who had just arrived by train, were waiting for

him on the steps of the château, and he quickly told them what had happened. The worthy fellows, who were not acquainted with M. Wassmann's story, showed some surprise in listening to Julien's abridged account of his various misdeeds, but when they knew the individual in question was certainly a Prussian spy they asked no more. They were as patriotic as La Chanterie, and the ex-quartermaster especially hated the soldiers of King William. He would at first hear of nothing less than taking the pavilion by assault and shooting M. Wassmann and the whole band; but Julien reminded him that before settling accounts with the ruffian it was necessary to save the poor woman. However, he had great trouble to appease his friend. They nevertheless sat down to dinner and did full justice to three partridges and a pheasant, cooked by the young keeper Bernard, and shot in the Count de Branaes's woods by the old keeper, La Bretèche, who wished to leave as little game as possible for the Prussian officers when they arrived. The dinner over, they armed themselves. The two francs-tireurs had not brought their Remingtons, and Julien's chassepot was still at the depot of his battalion. The keepers, however, lent them three sporting guns of heavy calibre, which they loaded with ball, and night having now set in they started off.

La Chanterie, who knew the ground, undertook to direct the expedition, and proceeded along the towing-path, which was an easier approach than the wood. A quarter of an hour after leaving the château, the three friends reached the wall of Wassmann's garden, and stopped to concert together before going into action. The night was a clear one, and the sky full of stars. This mournful month of September, 1870, was a splendid one: you would have said that Nature derided the disasters of France. Standing on the towing-path the three friends were merely separated from the garden wall by a green bank, and they could plainly see the little gate some sixty paces above the path, and slightly to their right hand. Julien thought that the right moment had come for him to separate from his comrades. The sight of three armed men would certainly have terrified the unhappy Catherine, and, had she espied the party approaching the gate, she would certainly have fled into the pavilion. In order not to terrify her, it was necessary for Julien to approach alone, and with infinite precautions. Accordingly, it was settled that, instead of climbing straight up the grassy bank, they should diverge to the left, so as to reach the corner of the wall where Fabrègue and Du Tremblay were to remain as sentinels, ready to join La Chanterie at the first summons. In the meantime he was to glide past the wall till he reached the little gate.

The chance of being surprised by Wassmann and his men was thus duly provided against, and the scoundrels were to be fired at, at once, if they refused to surrender. Fabrègue longed for a tussle, and even Du Tremblay would have been equally glad to test his gun on a Prussian spy. Julien, on the contrary, preferred a peaceful issue to the expedition, for a nocturnal skirmish could not clear up the mystery attaching to the Pavillon des Sorbiers, and it might jeopardise the life of the young woman whom he wished to save. He therefore begged his comrades to show the greatest prudence; and then, having settled their plan of action they again went forward, and reached the corner of the wall without further incident.

The two francs-tireurs here took up their positions, while La Chanterie walked gently towards the gate. As he stealthily approached he wondered how he should prevent Catherine from running off as soon as she saw him. He hoped that in the darkness she would take him for his cousin, and the uniform and kepi would certainly help to mislead her; but he was not at all sure on the point, for women in love are wonderfully acute in recognizing the

et of their affections. Accordingly, as soon as he saw her he meant to out, "Henri de Braunes sends me to you," and then to hasten forward and in to her why he had come instead of his cousin; finally, he intended to her to open the gate and follow him. Recalling the terms of her letter, he expressed such an ardent desire to escape, he did not doubt about her enting to leave with him. He took care to carry his gun under his arm, that the sight of firearms, which officers do not usually carry, might not his chance as to recognition; and as it was highly probable that he d be the first on the spot, he intended to hide himself near the gate and

he was not further than ten paces from the gate, however, when he heard e one talking behind the wall. He stopped short and listened attentively. h voices were raised alternately: one was that of a woman—undoubtedlyherine—and the other that of a man he seemed to know. Julien proed a little further, and the words now fell more distinctly on his ear.

Whoever the people were, they were talking in German, and with great nation. Was it Wassmann who was taking the bass part in this duet? en thought so, without being quite certain, never having heard this pseudo-rian in anything but French. It is a well-known fact that nothing so eads the ear as a change of idiom. In this uncertainty ought Julien to y himself? He thought not. It was quite possible that the conversation going on between the girl and one of the servants. In that case it was to let them come to an explanation before he showed himself. He, there- did not stir.

t length the talking reached a higher key, but without La Chanterie being to catch the full drift of the phrases, although he was well acquainted with man. However, the odd words he did catch here and there at length ghtened him as to the nature of the dialogue. The man was imperiously manding, and the woman was refusing to obey. There was no longer any ot; it was Wassmann; he alone had the right to give any orders to Catherine. rything indicated, moreover, that he had surprised her waiting at the e gate, had reproached her with coming there, and was now trying to er away.

Julien hesitated no longer, but rushed forward. There came a sudden ek, as that of a woman violently assaulted.

"Help me, Henri! come to my help!" cried a voice in French—a voice h was as speedily stifled.

"You can call him if you like, he won't come, he is dead," replied Wassmann, e same language.

Julien reached the gate at a bound. Through the bars, and but two paces o him, he saw a white form, above which there towered a black shadow. as poor Catherine on her knees, whilst Wassmann twisted her arms to e her to follow him.

Julien raised his gun to aim at the ruffian, but he was too near the gate for purpose, and he had to draw back so as to place himself in a more favour- position. The movement revealed his presence. Wassmann struck the an in the chest with great violence, and then sprang quickly aside. re La Chanterie could cover him with his gun, he had disappeared behind ick clump of bushes, and hurried off as fast as he could.

"He has killed me," muttered Catherine; who had just fallen close to the

Julien was about to fire in the direction which the murderer had taken, but dying woman's sigh made him lower his gun.

"Help ! friends," he cried, and he threw himself with all his weight against the gate, to try and open it.

The victim lay before him, stretched on the grass, merely separated from him by the iron bars, which he shook furiously, but which resisted all his efforts. "The key—I have the key," said Catherine in a weak voice, almost a whisper. And she raised her arm, to give Julien the key which she had just drawn from her waistband. But her arm fell powerless to her side again, and the key rolled on the gravel walk.

Julien knelt down and tried to obtain it by passing his hand under the gate, but it was beyond his reach, and his fingers only touched poor Catherine's quivering form. He then hastily drew back his hand and gave a cry of horror—it was covered in blood.

"I am going to die—he has stabbed me to the heart. Henri—do you know Henri—the officer over there at the château—tell him that I loved him—that my last thoughts were of him——"

It was all over. The voice died away. Catherine was dead.

The two francs-tireurs arrived just as she was expiring. "What the deuce has happened ?" began Fabrègue.

"He has just murdered her," cried Julien, stooping to pick up his gun.

"Who ?"

"Wassmann—the Prussian—let us run—we will kill him like a mad dog." And turning round the corner of the wall, parallel to the one where he had left his confederates, he rushed up the slope as fast as he could, so as to reach the high road and the front entrance of the pavilion. Fabrègue and Du Tremblay had only understood one thing of all that had occurred, viz., that the Prussian had escaped, that they must cut off his retreat, and to beard him in his den. They ran as fast as Julien.

The bank was very steep, and at times very slippery. It took them some minutes to climb it, and they were just on the point of reaching the summit, when the noise of a horse galloping, echoed along the road.

"It is he !—he is making off !" cried Julien.

And, with a last effort, he reached the roadway. The horse, tearing on at full speed, had just passed by, and Wassmann was indeed its rider, for the east wind suddenly bore to Julien the mocking words, "Till we meet again, Monsieur de la Chanterie. Remember me kindly to your friend Robert."

Julien at once discharged both of his barrels of his gun, but the horseman was already too far off, and the bullets were lost in the darkness. The noise of the gallop subsisted for some little time, and finally died away.

"The scoundrel escapes us," furiously cried Fabrègue, who had just reached Julien.

"Let us search his house, we shall perhaps find the rest of the band there," suggested Du Tremblay.

"And we will succour his victim, if there is yet time" added Julien, wheeling round and darting towards the pavilion.

They found the large gate wide open, and the yard deserted. The landau was still there, but the servants had made off with the horses. Not a single light was burning at the windows of the house. Wassmann had evidently sent his servants away at nightfall. During his morning ride he had consulted with the German outposts, and, when surprised by Julien, had come back to fetch Catherine. The three friends ran across the garden and reached the little gate. The dead woman was lying in a pool of blood. Wassmann's dagger must have pierced her to the heart.

"Poor girl !" murmured Julien, "it was I who killed her."

XI.

The day which followed upon these dramatic events is one still well recollected the inhabitants of Châtres-sur-Marais. They learnt, on awaking, that the quarrel of the German army had occupied the heights of Comilly, opposite to the village, and that M. Wassmann, the rich and generous tenant of the château de Sallan, the devoted friend of France, had gone to join the Russians, after stabbing his daughter.

To tell the truth, the latter news astonished them a great deal less than the former did; for several days past self-delusion as to the enemy's progress had been their chief occupation. The Germans, it was said, had thoroughly spoiled the country. Wassmann had already quite won their sympathy, and they were not without believing that the Russian grandee was neither more nor than a spy and a murderer. They were obliged, however, to submit to silence, when they learned that the countess of Malmoiselle Catherine had been moved by the flight of the emperor, and that several had been found in the house, its doors closed, and ready to be taken by French troops and gendarmes. Wassmann had merely left his furniture and carriages behind him when he fled, as he never dreamed as soon as his friends, the Germans, occupied Comilly. He had carefully loaded off his papers, plans, and firearms, plain as if he had been going in a cart to the mill; in fact, he had no other sort of things of value, little by little, on the occasions of his daily rides and drives.

As soon as reference to his treason and crime gave rise to a deal of conversation, and that the countess of Malmoiselle told him of this occasion, several persons of the neighbourhood, who had been in the countess's pavilion when she had been there, and who were the same as those who were he had met in Paris, were brought forward, and that a little later on he had heard this fact from an investigating magistrate, who had refused to listen to him. From all this he drew the conclusion that the magistrate had been caught by the Russians, and the general story as well, for everyone was sure that he and the main de Brannes had been wounded at Sedan he had seen a report in the paper at Wassmann's. In reference to this question the countess even made a very fine speech at the club, at which his faithful friend still felt possible and declared that it was preferable that well-selected ponds should be appointed to the command of the various regiments. It was almost as fine a speech as one which he made a little later on advocating a torrential article. Several citizens of Comilly allowed themselves to be charmed by the countess's eloquence, and a little money was needed to bring out an article in the *châlon* and the *personage*, for the priest also was accused of having had friendly relations with the spy.

Fortunately the presence of Julien and his two friends moderated the ardour of these fiery patriots; the trio reinforcing M. de Brannes's keepers, there were determined protectors for the château and M. Jean; and no one cared to interfere with them. Moreover, whatever the young lady of the pavilion had done, all the inhabitants of the place deeply regretted her. She had done nothing but good in the village, and all manner of stories were concocted as to her origin and the cause of her death. In point of fact the various narratives were only so many conjectures, for no clue was obtained as to the mysterious hints of the story, and Catherine's real identity remained unknown.

M. de la Chanterie and the priest kept to themselves what they knew, so that nobody, not even cunning Dignonard, suspected the real facts of the drama.

enacted that summer night. Curiously enough, moreover, not one of the natives of the place had any idea of connecting the murder of Wassmann's asserted daughter with that of Michel the keeper. The crime in the Bélière woods had already been forgotten by the folks of Charly, just like the strange and fatal illness of Mademoiselle Rose.

Julien, however, was always thinking of these bygone matters and so was M. Jean. After that terrible night La Chanterie had hastened to the curé's house and acquainted him with all the strange and mournful events that had just occurred. But the priest was preparing for mass, and it was only at a late hour of the morning that he had leisure to discuss the change in the situation as regarded the prisoner at Mazas. Fabrègue and Du Tremblay had taken the train back to Paris, but not without promising their friend that they would return some day to explore the banks of the Marne. Indeed, Fabrègue took a solemn oath, that he would bring down the odious Wassmann, who could hardly have left the neighbourhood as he could be so useful to the German army in these parts.

La Chanterie on his side, also, wished to return to Paris as soon as possible, in view of giving his uncle full information as to what had occurred at Charly; he meant to tell the news to his uncle alone, for Henri was not in a fit state to hear that Catherine was dead; and as for Gabrielle, it was preferable to spare her all emotion until the time came for announcing that the poacher Robert had been set at liberty.

Just before noon, when M. Jean, returned from church with Marcel, who had been attending divine mass, he found Julien impatiently awaiting him in the parsonage garden. They sat down under a green arbour; Julien and M. Jean bent upon serious conversation, Marcel intent upon reading the story of Robinson Crusoe, which the priest had lent him as he had learnt his lessons properly.

"Providence would not permit a terrible judicial error," said the nephew of the Count de Brannes. "I shall see the investigating magistrate this evening, and I hope I shall forthwith obtain an order for Robert's discharge."

"I fear that you are mistaken on this point," murmured M. Jean.

"What! after hearing what happened at the pavilion you still think that there is no evidence as to Wassmann's rascality?"

"His rascality, yes, no doubt; but the share he is supposed to have had in the keeper's murder is another matter. It is now established that this scoundrel was a spy, and that he killed a poor creature whom we took for his daughter. But it is not proved that he killed Michel."

"Is it necessary to remind you of the letter written by his victim, the letter which he used as a gun-wad."

"That is a presumption but not a proof. It remains to be explained how he could have been at the Café du Grand-Vainqueur and in the Bélière woods at one and the same time."

"It is quite evident that Mademoiselle Rose was his accomplice, and that remorse at having perjured herself urged her to commit suicide."

"It is clear to you, perhaps, and to me also; but the magistrate cannot content himself with mere probabilities, and the *alibi* is still all powerful."

"I shall destroy that pretended *alibi*. I shall prove that Wassmann was able to leave the pavilion and return by the little garden gate."

"The shot which killed Michel was fired just at nine o'clock. I heard it and gave evidence to that effect. Now this man was at the café a few minutes before nine. Mademoiselle Rose declared so on oath."

"She lied, as I told you when I left the magistrate's chambers. You

member her embarrassed manner, her strange behaviour, her change of expression?"

"Perfectly. But that is a mere matter of personal recollection, and is not recorded in the judicial report, whereas the statements of this unhappy man were duly taken down, and corroborated by four inhabitants of Charly, who unanimously and unhesitatingly declared that Wassmann had been at the *fé du Grand-Vainqueur* at nine o'clock."

"Fine authority! that of Digonnard, Vétillet, and the rest of them!"

"I grant that they are people of no great respectability; but their evidence will still carry weight, for it is based on fact. Besides, to tell you the truth, I have serious reasons for doubting Robert's innocence, for the keeper's last words are graven deeply on my memory; the final word he wanted to say began with a 'p,' I'm sure. Whom could he have meant if not 'the poacher.'"

"Perhaps so; or, meaning Robert, he might have said the Parisian. That is the prisoner's *alias* about here."

"It's all the same; the jury will naturally think that Michel meant to say 'the poacher,' or 'the Parisian,' and lacked time and strength to do so."

"Really, your reverence, you are most discouraging. Must an innocent man be condemned, when the guilt of that abominable German is evident to all unprejudiced eyes?"

"No," said M. Jean warmly, "I won't give up all hopes of clearing Robert, and I am tempted, like you, to believe that Monsieur Wassmann's *alibi* is founded on some fraud. But how can we possibly prove that?"

"Yes, where can we find a truthful witness? No one was there excepting that woman who paid for the lie by her life, and the four stupid bigwigs of Charly."

"Ah!" exclaimed the priest, seized with a sudden inspiration; "why didn't I think of it before? Marcel was there." And turning to the child, who was absorbed in his book, he asked, "Do you know, my lad, what poor Mademoiselle Rose died of?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Marcel, closing his book, and raising his wondering eyes, "Oh, yes! I know, it was the clock that killed her."

"The clock!" exclaimed M. Jean; "come, Marcel, think of what you are saying! Don't be childish, but reply sensibly."

"But, your reverence, I assure you that it was the clock that made her ill," murmured the lad.

"This is most peculiar," said Julien. "Do you remember that the wretched woman talked about the clock while she was dying?"

"Explain yourself, my friend," said the priest to Marcel; "how do you now that it was the clock that made her ill?"

"Because Mamma Lesloux took me every evening to Mademoiselle Rose's, while she was ill," replied Marcel; "and I saw she was always taken with it at the same hour."

"Taken with what? Ah! her fever! Yes, no doubt, as it was intermittent and returned periodically. But what connection —"

"Pray let me question him," interrupted Julien. "Tell me, little chap, what happened of an evening, when you were alone with her?"

"Oh! sir, it was very sad, and I felt very sorry to see her like that. At first she laughed—and seemed pleased to see me—and said to me, 'Marcel, place the stools round the corner table. The gentlemen will be here presently.' Then I arranged the stools, and she fetched the dominoes. And then she went to the door, to see if anyone was coming—but she saw no one, and came back;

and I heard her say in a low voice, 'they are all deserting me. I am ruined.'"

"She was alluding to her customers," whispered M. Jean, "since Monsieur Vétillet has become major, and Monsieur Digonnard has taken up politics so madly; they have neglected their favourite amusement, and it is not surprising that the poor old maid——"

"But the clock; what about the clock?" resumed Julien.

"Well, sir, when she had sat down at her counter, she made me sit beside her, and began to tell me beautiful stories to amuse me; but while I listened, I noticed that she kept staring at the clock; I looked too, and as the short hand approached nine, and the long hand twelve, Mademoiselle Rose grew quite pale and forgot where she was in the story; she ended by coming to a dead stop at last and shut her eyes—you would have thought she was asleep."

"It's incomprehensible!" muttered the priest.

"Not to me," said Julien excitedly. "Go on, Marcel; what did she do afterwards?"

"Afterwards? Why she got up quite suddenly, and said to me 'Boy, open the clock case and stop the pendulum. The noise makes my head ache.' It amused me to touch the works, so I climbed upon a stool, opened the case, and held the large piece of lead, at the end of a long wire, so that it couldn't tick any more."

"And then she seemed relieved?"

"Oh! yes; for she began the story again and went on to the end."

"And the clock remained stopped?"

"Not all the time. When ten o'clock struck at the church, Mademoiselle Rose left the counter, opened the glass front of the dial, and moved the hands; then she opened the case and made the pendulum swing again, and when Mama Ledoux came to fetch me, Mademoiselle Rose used to say to her, 'I have had my attack, but I'm better now.'"

"A curious attack which depended on the swinging of a pendulum," whispered Julien in the priest's ear.

"And which came on regularly at nine o'clock," murmured M. Jean; "it was at nine o'clock Michel was——"

"It was not fever, but intermittent remorse. Now my little fellow, tell me, you did not see Mademoiselle Rose the day she died?"

"Excuse me, sir. Mama Ledoux took me to the café sooner than usual, as she was going to carry some vegetables to Joinville-le-Fort, and did not wish to leave me alone in the house. My dear Lehoux hadn't returned from Paris, and——"

"Did anyone come to the café whilst you were there?"

"Yes, sir. The tall gentleman from the Pavillon des Sorbiers."

"Wassmann! Ah! I divined it," exclaimed Julien; "now we shall have a proof. What did the gentleman do, child?"

"He came in a dog-cart, and stopped in front of the door, got out, and told me to hold his horse, then he went in, and talked with Mademoiselle Rose."

"What did they talk about?"

"I don't know, I didn't listen. Only I saw her serve him with some beer."

"And she drank some too, I suppose?"

"Yes; he took the bottle, poured out three tumblers, and sent Mademoiselle Rose with one to me, but I wouldn't drink it, for I don't like beer, it's too bitter."

"Happily," muttered M. Jean, "God Himself protected the poor child."

"And whilst the landlady came to the door did the gentleman remain

ne at the counter, where the two other glasses were standing?" asked La anterie, following up his idea.

"Yes, sir."

"And when she went back they chinked glasses and she drank with him?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear what was said as he left?"

"I heard the gentleman say, 'Be easy, I am looking after you; what I promised you shall be done this week, and you shall leave the country.' Then he got into his carriage, as he had business near Apilly, and drove off at full gallop."

"I remember very well seeing him pass along the road," said the priest.

"Yes; he was making off after committing the crime; that is his usual dodge; it had served him well already once before," replied Julien, ironically.

"What happened after his departure?" he added, turning to Marcel.

"Mama Ledoux passed by with her donkey just as the gentleman had gone; she came in, and then Mademoiselle Rose gave a shriek. She threw up her arms and fell all of a heap on the floor."

"And Jacqueline sent you off to fetch the priest?"

"Yes; as Mademoiselle Rose came to, she said, 'A priest; I want to confess myself.' So I ran to the parsonage, and on to the château. And Mademoiselle Rose's face had so terrified me that I tore off so soon as I had spoken to the parson's servant, and hid myself behind Mama Ledoux's house."

"Well, your reverence, do you now doubt that this man poisoned the unhappy woman who died before our eyes?" asked Julien.

"No," replied M. Jean; "and if we had been aware of his visit to the café the night perhaps have prevented another crime—the one he committed last night."

"Madame Ledoux knew very well that I had seen the gentleman from the pavilion," said Marcel, softly.

"And, according to the custom of country folks, she took care to say nothing about it."

"You no longer doubt, I hope, but what the deceased was Wassmann's accomplice?" resumed Julien. "This remorse, returning as it did always at the same hour, is very significant. She had lied, like all the rogues who were at her place on the night of Michel's murder; she lied in affirming that the murderer was in the café at the very moment when he was committing his crime in the Bélière woods."

"That now seems very probable to me, but I am quite puzzled as to all these contradictions."

"We know enough to go and ask the magistrate for Robert's discharge."

M. Jean shook his head, and did not seem particularly convinced. "Something more is wanted," he murmured, "we still possess nothing but conjectures, not one proof positive, and as long as we cannot establish what infernal trick this man played to prove his *alibi*—"

"Marcel!" cried Julien, struck with a sudden inspiration; "do you remember what happened at the café, on the evening you arrived at Charly?"

"Yes sir; Mama Ledoux took me to Mademoiselle Rose's. It was growing dark, and when we went in Mademoiselle Rose was standing on a high stool and she gave her a great fright."

"On a stool! near the clock, eh?"

"Yes, and she got down at once, as she had finished setting the hands."

"The hands ! she was touching the hands ?"

"Yes, sir. Mama Ledoux paid no attention to it, but I heard the click of the glass case, as Mademoiselle Rose shut it too."

"And she was putting the hands back, eh ? my boy ?"

"I don't know, sir, because she hid the clock from me. But afterwards, when Mama Ledoux came back crying that her cousin had been killed, all the gentlemen who were playing dominoes, ran out into the street—and Mam'zelle Rose suddenly fell quite ill. So Mama Ledoux threw some water in her face and that made her come to. Then Mama Ledoux went outside too, and I remained alone with Mam'zelle Rose, who sprang up on the stool and moved the hands. She turned the long one more than half way round the face of the clock——"

"At last !" exclaimed Julien, "now we know what the *alibi* was founded upon. Rose put the hands on to the right time, after previously putting them back."

"And when she had done," continued Marcel, "she whispered to me, 'My little fellow, you mustn't tell anyone that I gave the hands a push with my thumb; and if you keep quiet, I'll give you a cake every day.'"

"Embrace me, my dear child," said M. Jean, who was weeping for joy, "you have just saved your father's life !"

XII.

Six weeks had elapsed. It was now nearly the end of October, and each day the iron circle round Paris grew closer and closer. Beyond the Marne you were in Prussia. Charly-sous-Bois was situated at the extreme boundary of the Parisian territory, on the eastern side, and it was only held by outposts. The cannon of the fort of Nogent protected it sufficiently to prevent the Germans from settling there, but they could not prevent the incursions of the enemy's patrols who prowled about the neighbourhood every night.

And so the pleasant village was almost deserted. The Mayor, M. Vétillet, had long ago placed himself in security behind the fortifications of the capital. Digouard had closed his shop, and only appeared at Charly at long intervals to display the *kepi* with which he had adorned his head since the outset of the siege. Cruchot and Verduron presided over a suburban refugees' club at Bercy. Old Ledoux and his wife Jacqueline, by virtue of the law on absentees, occupied some fine rooms on the Boulevard Haussmann, where they had installed themselves together with certain domestic pets. In the village there only remained about a hundred obstinate people, who were more plucky than their fellow citizens, or more attached to their belongings ; together with M. de Brannes's two keepers, the priest and his old servant.

M. Jean had experienced great delight during the preceding month. Robert had been set at liberty. The charges brought against him would not hold out, after the suspicious conduct of M. Wassmann, his precipitate flight, the murder of Catherine, and above all, the clear and precise evidence given by little Marcel.

The investigating magistrate had questioned the child several times, and he was convinced that he had told the truth on all points. Rose must have been poisoned by the Prussian. The latter, having heard of the remorse which tortured her, had murdered her to prevent her from confessing the thumb stroke, by which his *alibi* had been established.

The anonymous letter, received by Jacqueline on the morning of the murder, was compared with the missive which had served as a gun wad, and

th that which had been intended for Henri de Brannes. There was no doubt as to the identity of the three handwritings, so that the guilt of the tenant of the pavilion was plainly established. On the other hand, it became certain that M. Wassmann had merely stayed in Paris and at Charly played the spy, and that he was indebted for his apparent opulence to funds secretly supplied him by the Prussian Legation. His position as a diplomatic and military spy being fully established, his conduct was perfectly logical, and his crimes fitted naturally one into the other.

He had killed Michel Amstein, because Amstein, an Alsatian, had formerly known him at Colmar, where he was already playing his usual game, probably under another name; and because he feared that the gamekeeper would recognise him and denounce him as a Prussian spy. He had killed Rose because Rose had been his accomplice in this murder, and Rose might be tempted to talk. He had killed Catherine, because Catherine also possessed the secret, and especially because she had refused to second his ignoble projects, and to follow him to the headquarters of the German army.

Julien, in the course of numerous interviews with the magistrate, succeeded in piecing together the story of the first crime, including all the details of its preparation and execution. Wassmann, having determined to murder Michel, had only awaited a favourable occasion for doing so with impunity. For several days past the landlady of the Grand Vainqueur, apparently located at Charly by Wassmann himself, and obliged to obey him by reason of some old complicity which made her his dependent, the landlady, we say, had received secret orders to put the hands of the clock back every evening, at a time when the keeper was on his usual round in the Bélière woods. Marcel's accident furnished the desired opportunity. Wassmann, on the Place de la Bastille, had at once planned the scheme of giving Jacqueline Ledoux an appointment at the café kept by Mademoiselle Rose, so that he might show himself there in the presence of the bigwigs of the place, on the very natural pretext of inquiring after the child who had been knocked down by his horses. Everything thus being afore-planned, he must have gone off, duly disguised and armed, by the little garden gate, at about half-past eight o'clock; have reached M. de Brannes's food as rapidly as possible, and have hidden himself there close to the path which the keeper usually followed on his rounds.

Michel having been shot dead at nine o'clock precisely, Wassmann must have rushed off as quickly as possible, have returned by the same road to the pavillon des Sorbiers, have hastily divested himself of the blouse and pantaloons, which he had put on over his other clothes, and then have walked quickly along the village high street towards the Grand-Vainqueur, which he had really reached at about half-past nine, although the clock, thanks to Mademoiselle Rose's skilful thumb-stroke, pointed to 8.50. Thus was explained the *alibi* which had almost sent an innocent man to the guillotine.

As to the warning sent to Madame Ledoux by that wretched girl Catherine, it was easily explained. Wassmann's pretended daughter knew Jacqueline, who often brought flowers to the pavilion; she had often chatted with her, and might easily have heard her say that Michel was her cousin. Decided on trying to prevent a crime which she clearly foresaw, and being reluctant to denounce Wassmann, to whom fate had bound her, she had thought of warning the gardener's wife by an anonymous letter, being, no doubt, unaware of the fact that this woman could not read. Fate had intervened. The letter had been read too late; Robert had gone poaching in the Bélière woods at the exact time when Wassmann was lying in wait for Michel. The rest is known.

As for Julien's personal adventures with the Prussian, the young fellow

could not arrive at a positive certainty. Still, he remained perfectly convinced that it was Wassmann whom he had hunted through the wood, and whom he had found on the banks of the Marne, pretending to paint a landscape. He also persisted in thinking that this spy, of whom he had made such an enemy, by undertaking Robert's defence, had tried to rob him of the compromising letter—once by burglary, and on another occasion by violence on the boulevard; that this same rascal had tried to drown him in the Seine in front of the island of Croissy, and that the noble Saint-Avertin was an agent he had subsidized to give him a sword thrust. Saint-Avertin, by the way, had scrambled away like a hare a few days before the investment of Paris, and it was highly probable that he was now ruralizing in one of the departments occupied by the German forces.

The investigating magistrate had admitted all these facts, the first as proven, the others as probable; and, in consequence, he had given orders for Robert to be set at liberty. At any other time the poacher, discharged as to the murder, would probably have been kept in prison for vagrancy, poaching, and so forth. But Paris was now in a state of siege, and the working magistrate was of opinion that, instead of keeping a strong, bold fellow under lock and key, it would be better to grant him liberty to go and fight for his country.

Robert wished nothing better, and for many reasons. First of all his temperament urged him to fighting, and he had a particular grudge against the Germans; however, during his protracted detention at Mazas, a very great change had come over him.

On learning from M. Jean the touching story of Eugénie's devotion for a rival's child, now so miraculously discovered; on seeing the written proof of Marcel's parentage, the poacher had begun to look more kindly on his wife and offspring. He had, indeed, begged his wife's pardon for all the undeserved suffering she had experienced, and he seemed disposed to make her as happy as he could, to live for her and her children, including the little foundling whom she had as generously welcomed as if he had come of her own blood; for since the Ledoux's departure from Charly, Marcel had lived at Antoine Cormier's house, with his half brothers, and Eugénie had treated him, as if he were her own son. However, at the same time as Robert evinced sincere repentance for the past and a warm attachment for his family, he expressed a firm wish to atone for his past misconduct by future acts. On leaving prison, he had barely taken time to embrace his wife and children, before enlisting in a small corps of *francs-tireurs*, not those who paraded through Paris in fanciful costumes and plumed hats; for the comrades he chose were all men determined on bold and resolute fighting, such as was likely to endanger their lives.

M. de la Chanterie, whom he went to thank on the same day as he received his discharge, tried to persuade him to enlist in a marching battalion of the National Guard where, with his former experience as a non-commissioned officer, he might have been very useful; but nothing would make him do so. Robert meant to see the enemy as often as possible, and at close quarters. So, on the third day after his discharge, he was already at the outposts on the Marne. Eugénie wept bitterly, but resigned herself, for she realised that her husband needed to reinstate himself in public opinion, and then she hoped that he again loved her, and that Providence would protect him.

Happiness had now returned to the Rue de Charonne. The Cormiers, saved from the usurers' clutches, paid their debt of gratitude to the good priest of Charly by overwhelming those in whom he was interested with loving care. The prospect was brighter also at the Count de Brannes's mansion on the Quai d'Orsay. Henri was now convalescent and anxious to resume active

vice. Gabrielle had confessed to her father how much she loved Julien, and had obtained his consent to their future marriage. But before the wedding could take place the war must come to an end, and when and how would it finish? This was the question that three of the principal personages of our story were debating one fine morning towards the end of October, as they were assembled together in the belfry of Charly church.

Jean de la Chanterie was now serving in the 7th battalion of the Mobile Artillery, engaged in the Bois de Boulogne, and it was only at long intervals that he asked for a short leave to go and see his mother, Henri and Gabrielle. At this particular occasion, however, he had set out early in the morning, and after breakfasting with M. de Bennes he had taken the Vincennes railway-car, and put in a seat at a window, so that he could look out at Charly, where M. Jean received him with open arms. His surprise was considerable when he found the peaceful little town of Charly, which was considerably smaller than he had been expecting, and which he had been told was a fine town. He had been packed and for three weeks along the bank of the Marne, between Jéteuil and Charly, and then, upon his return, he had to pay the priest's visit, had left his carriage before Charly, and crossed the woods, his rifle on his shoulder and his hunting-bag in his belt.

The reception was gay and cordial on both sides. Julien knew that Robert was atoning for his past life by being like a lion, and showed no fuss at treating him as a lion in armor. M. Jean, on his side, entertained the earnest friendship, and even a little admiration, for Julien, while he showed great sympathy for Marcel's father, founded on an appreciation of his return to better conduct.

Robert had sworn and had given his word of honor for his protectors, and the morning was calm and fine for the occasion. Handshakes were exchanged; the trifling of a bottle of the priest's wine, and a great deal of the present, drinking to the defense of the Germans, to the health of old bravery, which the priest had held in reserve for some grand occasion.

Julien and Robert meant to return to their posts in the evening, and before the hour for parting came, M. Jean wished to show them the Prussian lines, at so great a distance from the village. They were to be seen extremely clearly on the church steeple, where the military engineers had placed a telescope and signal apparatus.

For the moment there was no one on duty in this observatory, and the priest, who had a key of the belfry stairs, could easily conduct his friends to see the curious scene now presented by the neighbourhood of Charly, formerly so peaceful, so charming and coquettish. Behind them stretched the woods of Vincennes, where the leaves already yellow, were falling amid the cold autumnal winds; at their feet flowed the Marne, silent and deserted, the Marne whose banks had once resounded the joyous songs of bathing parties; while further off stretched the plain of Villiers, grey and barren; and, further still, arose the woody slopes of Châtigny. Nothing was stirring on this sad landscape. Only here and there tiny coils of smoke ascended from behind some bushes or felled trees, marking a German bivouac. The enemy was there.

Sometimes a little white cloud emerged from the fringe of trees along the river side, and the wind wafted the ping of a rifle bullet fired by some hidden sharpshooter on the bank.

La Chanterie having scanned the desolate horizon with his eyes, suddenly glanced at the Pavillon des Sorbiers. He again beheld the garden and the little gate-nigh which poor Catherine had fallen, and he thought of M. Wassmann's unhappy victim.

"Poor woman!" said M. Jean to him who had guessed his thoughts. "To end thus! Shall we ever know her real name and the ties which bound her to that monster?"

"I greatly fear we never shall, any more than we shall ever learn the exact name of his other victim, that woman Rose. I should really like to find the scoundrel to send a bullet after him."

"If your battalion comes here," said the priest, "you may possibly see him, for he has not left the neighbourhood, and I have seen him distinctly several times."

"You have seen him?" exclaimed Julien, completely astounded.

"As clear as I see you. I don't know what office he fills, something half civil and half military, at the head-quarters of the German army, now before us, but he rides along the river bank, opposite his old home. With this telescope I can recognise him perfectly whenever he shows himself."

"Is it possible! You really make me long to ask for four day's leave to station myself on the bank, and fire at him when he appears."

"Oh! he takes great precautions; still I am convinced that he often crosses the Marne at nightfall, and prowls about the pavilion and the village."

"Then it would be easy to watch him, and——"

"Your reverence," now said Robert, who had been looking through the telescope, "there is a man on horseback coming yonder, behind the fringe of poplars—ah! now I see him clearly—he is stopping by the water-side and looking in this direction with a glass. Ah! he has put it back in his pocket—and he shows his hideous face. But a thousand thunderbolts!" added the poacher, suddenly—"it is Tichdorf!"

"Tichdorf!" said the vicar and Julien together; "who is Tichdorf?"

"The scoundrel who denounced me to the police, after having pretended to conspire with me—the rascal who wrote anonymous letters to me about my wife"

"Ah! I remember!" muttered M. Jean; "you told me about him when you were in prison! He had been your partner and ruined you."

"And he was a Prussian. That's it," said Robert; "but, dash it, I never thought I should meet him here prancing about on a fine horse. I thought he had been hanged in his own country."

"Are you sure it is he?"

"Perfectly sure. The telescope is an excellent one. Besides I should have recognised Tichdorf merely by his red whiskers, which are like the fans of a windmill. Ah! the rascal! This time he won't go off as he came, and not later than this very night——"

"Let us have a look," said Julien, now taking Robert's place at the telescope.

"It's most peculiar," muttered the priest; "with the bare eye I seem to recognise both the horse and man."

"It's Wassmann!" exclaimed Julien.

"Ah! I knew I was not mistaken," replied M. Jean. "Besides he comes to that same spot almost every evening."

"And I, gentlemen," said the poacher; "I maintain that the fellow is my man Tichdorf. Do you think I could forget the face of a man who robbed me, betrayed me, sold me up?"

"Neither can one forget a wretch who has murdered and poisoned," interrupted Julien; "but we are both right—Tichdorf and Wassmann are one and the same!"

"What! Wassmann, the man up at the pavilion! the fellow who ——"

"Who killed Michel ; yes, the man whose infernal cunning almost sent him to the scaffold. He called himself Tichdorf five years ago when he gave me up to the police ; but he changed his name to return to France."

"All right !" said Robert, between his teeth ; "he has a good reckoning to pay."

"What an unheard of adventure," exclaimed the priest, who had been looking through the telescope ; "like you, I am now sure that it is Wassmann, but I cannot make out how a man can have played so many different parts in Paris in so few years without any one suspecting him."

"We are so trustful, and so silly, we Frenchmen," said Julien, bitterly ; "don't you know that for the last ten years Prussia has not ceased sending spies here, spies under all sorts of disguises. Besides, Robert has more to tell us, and we shall probably learn many things we are still ignorant of. How did you happen to know this Tichdorf ?"

"I saw him for the first time, a long while ago, when I was in garrison at Colmar. It was said there that he had come from Baden. He led a very fast life and was always thick with the non-commissioned officers ; he stood them good dinners, and gave the soldiers plenty of drink."

"Dash it ! then he had already begun his trade of spy, and now I think of it was then he must have met Michel Amstein."

"Not at that time, but later on. He was always going about Alsace, especially in the garrison towns ; so much so that every one distrusted him, from what I heard long afterwards ; too late for me, unfortunately, for I had met him again in Paris, where he pretended to be in business ; he shewed me a deal of attention, and I went into partnership with him. You know the rest."

"Did you ever meet, either at his house, or with him, a young girl ——"

"No, an old one, or rather a middle-aged woman, who managed a liquor shop for him on the Boulevard du Temple, and who passed for having been his mistress. I think he brought her from Metz."

"Poor Mademoiselle Rose also came from Metz," said M. Jean.

"Was she fair, stout, a little pimpled ?" asked Robert.

"Yes, just so."

"That's her ! This woman was his mere tool, and apparently was well acquainted with his spying practices. I heard in England that she had disappeared at the same time as he did."

"And he evidently brought her back, when he returned to France, under another name, and set up at Charly. He took the Café du Grand Vainqueur for her, so as to hear what went on in the village. We know how the café served him in poor Michel's case."

"The unhappy woman paid dearly for her guilty complaisance," said the curé, softly.

"It only remains for us to discover the true personality of his pretended daughter," replied Julien. "At present you know that Wassmann was formerly called Tichdorf. Can you guess, Robert, who that girl Catherine could be—that Catherine who was so cruelly treated by the rascal ?"

"I never saw her, so I can say nothing about it. During his earlier stay in Paris, when we were partners, he had neither wife nor daughter with him. But I would wager that this girl Catherine you speak of was the child of some worthy people with whom he once lodged at Colmar. I remember that in my time they had a child of that name. Naturally she must have grown up, and when Tichdorf returned to Alsace, he perhaps seduced her, and took her away with him."

"Very likely. So this last victim of Wassmann's was French, like the others."

"Another reason why I should kill him," said Robert, seizing hold of his Remington, which he had placed in a corner.

"What are you going to do, my friend?" asked M. Jean.

"I have just told you, your reverence," replied Robert; "I am going to crush a venomous reptile—to kill Tichdorf."

"But I hope you don't think of attacking him among all the Prussian soldiers?"

"It would not be the first time I have picked off one of the sentries on their lines. But in Tichdorf's case I shall leave nothing to chance, and I have another plan. The ruffian will cross the river to-night, I'll answer for it."

"It is highly probable," replied Julien, who had taken the poacher's place at the telescope. "He has just placed his horse in charge of a soldier, who is leading it away, and he is now talking to some sharpshooters hidden behind that fringe of poplars. Daylight is waning; there must be a boat hidden somewhere by the bank."

"Yes," replied the priest; "they have a boat over yonder behind the willow tree which bends over the water."

"It's just as I thought," replied Robert. "I know now what I have to do. You may reckon that this night poor Michel will be avenged."

"May I go with you?" asked Julien, excitedly.

The poacher hesitated for an instant before replying, but he ended by saying "No; I'd rather not. To work properly, I must be quite alone. Excuse me, sir, if I refuse you, but this scoundrel may defend himself, and if he is to do any further mischief to anybody, I don't want it to be to you."

"And if he kills you?" asked Julien.

"If he kills me, the loss won't be very great; but I feel certain that he won't kill me."

"Besides are you not obliged to return to your battalion this evening?" said M. Jean, turning towards Julien.

"I did mean to go, but in point of fact I have forty-eight hours' leave."

"Very well, you must spend twenty-four of them with me," exclaimed the curé, joyously. "You must remember that you belong to the regular army, and that a soldier's first duty is to be killed at his post, and nowhere else. You have no right to undertake any expeditions on your own account."

"Yes, sir," said Robert; "it seems to me that his reverence is right. Let me ply my calling as a *franc-tireur*, and I promise you that all will go well."

"Ah! if I only had my chassepot," murmured La Chanterie.

"Yes, but you haven't got it," replied the priest, "and you won't give me the pain of remaining all alone this evening when I so rarely see you?"

"All right, I'll stay; but if Robert is not successful to-night, I shall tackle Wassmann to-morrow on my own account."

"I will try to save you the trouble of doing so," muttered the ex-poacher. "Good-bye, gentlemen."

"At least, promise me," cried M. Jean, "that you will come to-morrow morning and reassure us, for I shall not feel easy till I see you again."

"I promise you," said Robert, and forthwith he darted down the stairs.

Julien made a movement as if to follow him, but the priest held his arm, and whispered to him: "Your uncle and cousin would never forgive you if you took part in a nocturnal expedition against this man. After what has passed between you two it would be almost murder."

The young fellow was silent; he quite realised that it would not look well

him to watch for his personal enemy, and kill him in Red Indian fashion. A few minutes later, the priest and Julien, from their high position on the rock tower, where they remained till the close of the day, saw Robert walk quietly along the high road, stop in front of the open gate of the Pavillon des Sribiers, and finally disappear behind the garden walls.

"He thinks that Wassmann goes to visit his old house at night time, and means to wait him there," said M. Jean. "He is perhaps not far wrong." All was now still on both banks of the Marne, which seemed perfectly deserted. Night fell, and the priest and Julien left their observatory to return to the parsonage, where they passed a somewhat sad evening together. After supper, frugally, for food was already growing scarce, and discussing both the past and the future, they retired to rest at an early hour, promising to meet in the belfry tower at dawn. Julien could not close his eyes all night. He thought every minute that he should hear some shots fired in the direction of the Pavillon des Sribiers, but he was mistaken; the night proved exceptionally quiet. You would have thought that you were sixty miles from the enemy's outposts.

The silence worried La Chanterie as to the poacher's fate, and M. Jean no doubt shared in his fears, for he came to rouse his guest, before daybreak, to propose that they should return to their post of observation. They each of them thought that Robert had been killed or taken prisoner, but did not confide their impressions to one another.

They had been for a period of an hour at the signal window of the steeple, and the silvery light of dawn was rising over the horizon, when Julien, who was already looking through the telescope, exclaimed, "I think I see him. Yes, he is standing up, but I don't shoot at the German in which poor La herine expired. Yes, yes, it's certainly he. I recognize his large hood and broad-brimmed felt hat. What the deuce is he doing there?"

"He is no longer waiting for Wassmann, but he will be killed, the foolish fellow, for opposite him, at less than two hundred yards, all the left bank of the Marne is covered with German sentinels hidden behind the trees, and he will be a target for them as soon as day breaks."

"They won't wait for daylight; I have just seen a little puff of smoke rising from behind the willows. Listen!"

At this moment the ping of a rifle-shot broke upon the deep silence of the twilight.

"Happily, they have missed him," said Julien, still at the telescope. "Having been warned like that, he will surely pack off."

"God be praised!" muttered the priest.

"No, he is still there—he must be mad; he might, at any rate, reply to the fire. But no; his Remington is beside him, and he doesn't even touch it; he must mean to be killed."

"Ah, they are firing again! They are all firing; they are firing in volleys!" cried M. Jean, exclaiming, pointing to a large cloud of smoke rising above the river-bank.

"He falls—he has fallen!" replied La Chanterie. "This time they have not missed him, the wretch. There's one more of Wassmann's victims!"

"Poor Robert!" murmured the vicar, bending down to pray.

"I will revenge him," said Julien, shaking his fist at the Germans. "Wassmann has the best of it just now, but it won't be for long; I will kill him or he shall kill me. But who would ever have suspected such impudence, on the part of this unlucky fellow, to place himself within pistol-shot of the Prussian lines!"

M. Jean had risen. He had finished his prayer and was gazing sadly at the high road, which stretched away at the foot of the steeple. "It is most peculiar," he muttered suddenly; "there is a man just leaving the pavilion and coming in this direction."

Indeed! exclaimed La Chanterie, leaving his telescope and leaning out of the Gothic window; "why, he looks like a Prussian. Do you see his flat cap with a red border? Ah! if it is one of those ruffians, who has had the audacity to stroll about Charly after killing our poor Robert, he shall pay for it."

"Wait a bit! he is waving his gun as if making a sign to us. If it were —"

"Well, really—his figure and his breadth of shoulders —"

"He is taking off his cap—he is bowing to us—really I am not mistaken; it is Robert!"

Julien, who had also recognised the poacher, replied by a shout of delight, and hurried down the stairs. The priest followed as quickly as his old legs would allow him; and they met the poacher at the church porch, and embraced him warmly.

"We thought you were dead," said La Chanterie. "What has happened, then? Just now, as we saw you dressed like that, we did not recognise you."

"Ah! yes, on account of the cap with the red band. It is Tichdorf's," replied Robert, coolly.

"What! Tichdorf's! but I thought I saw you fall, struck by several rifle bullets over yonder at the end of the pavilion garden —"

"It was Tichdorf who fell."

"Tichdorf! Wassmann! that's impossible."

"Excuse me—it cost me a new felt hat and overcoat, but we are at last rid of the rascal. His good friends the Prussians have put a bullet in his head and two in his chest, that just makes up his reckoning for the three persons he sent into the other world."

"Come—explain yourself! I can't understand."

"I realise that. Yesterday evening I had no time to talk to you of my plan. In these cases I have a method of my own, which never fails. I don't like to use my gun; it makes a noise and attracts attention. But I always carry side-arms and a cord with a running noose about me."

"And you surprised Wassmann?"

"Well, I was pretty sure that he would cross the Marne in a boat, and pay a visit to his old country house, where he perhaps has some secret hiding-place of his own. So I planted myself quietly against the wall at the bottom of the garden, just inside the little gate. I said to myself, "If he brings anyone with him, I won't stir from my corner; I shall let him pass in, and try to catch him afterwards; but I felt almost sure that he would come alone. And I wasn't mistaken, only I had to wait a long while. It was past midnight when I heard some talking in German on the towing-path. The soldier who had rowed Tichdorf over was taking his orders before returning. I leant forward to look, and saw a man climbing the ascent alone. Thereupon, I drew back and got my cord ready. The rest went on castors, I may say. At the minute he passed through the gateway I threw my noose round his neck, and I pulled hard. He fell like a slaughtered ox; I had half strangled him at the first effort."

"He was not dead, however, as——"

"No, fortunately, for I had a little plan of my own. I might have killed him with my hunting knife, but it went against me to do so. However, I bound

in tightly, hands and feet, with another bit of cord which I had in my pocket, when I gagged him with my worsted belt, and when I felt quiet sure he could neither move nor cry out, I loosened the noose. He came to himself again, and when I took the pleasure of whispering my name, and a couple of words as to the old reckoning we had to settle. He could not answer me, but I heard him and his teeth."

After telling him all I had at heart, I dragged him outside, raised him in my arms, placed him upright against the gate, and tied him there, so that he could not fall. Then I took his cap and cloak, and I put my felt hat on his head, my overcoat over his shoulders. Finally, I again hid behind the wall, and remained there till daybreak. I wanted to see the end of the play."

"How horrible!" muttered M. Jean.

"Horrible, yes; but he richly deserved it. I repeat that I had calculated correctly, for, soon as it grew light, the German sentries saw a man leaning against the garden gate. They took him for a Frenchman—a *franc-tireur*—and fired several shots, which did not miss aim. That was all I wished. Tichdorf deserved some German lead. As soon as I felt sure that he was dead I came away, and here I am."

Julien had listened composedly to this terrible story, which made the good priest tremble. "God has punished Michel's murderer," now said the Count de Brannes's nephew.

"Alas! are we quite sure it was he?" replied M. Jean, seized with pity and lingering scruple which the description of Wassmann's fate had awakened in his mind.

"What, your reverence, are you still dubious after so many proofs?"

"Do what I will, Michel's last words always return to me, and——"

"What was it that Michel said before he expired?" asked Robert.

"He muttered some inarticulate syllables," replied Julien. "He muttered something like this: 'It is the prr, the po, the p——'"

"And his reverence thinks that he meant to say: 'It is the poacher!'"

"Yes, I own it; the word Michel tried to say certainly began with a p, and——"

"But Michel was an Alsatian," exclaimed Robert; "and he spoke in a queer sort of way."

"Yes, he did."

"Then I have it; he meant to say 'the Prussian.' Yes, that must have been it; he couldn't get at the sound distinctly, being at his last gasp."

"It's curious we didn't think of that before now," said Julien. "But you are undoubtedly right, Robert. Michel meant to say the Prussian; and by the Prussian he meant Tichdorf, or Wassmann if you like it better—Wassmann, who pretended to be an Austrian, and thus led us astray."

The priest began to pray softly. He thanked Providence for having relieved him of the weight which had still oppressed his conscience, and he bowed in reverence before the Justice of Heaven.

* * * * *

Julien de la Chanterie married Gabrielle a year after the war between France and Germany came to a close. Henri de Brannes is now a major, and at times still thinks of poor Catherine; his father, the count, has taken Robert for his head-keeper, and the poachers have a hard time of it, in confiding with a man who was formerly one of themselves.

Eugénie is also installed at Chasseneuil, with her children. She has regained her husband's and the little ones their father's affection. They are all very happy. M. Jean is finishing Marcel's education and will make a man of him. The Corniers are no longer in debt and seem in a fair way to make their fortune, but usury has ruined Vétillet; and Digonard is just now working out a term of hard labour in New Caledonia. God is just.

Fabrégué has again enlisted in the cavalry and gained his epaulettes. Du Tremblay is a sub-prefect. The tribe of Red Indians has dispersed. As for the charming village of Charly-sous-Bois, it now bears no traces of the havoc wrought by warfare, and the Café du Grand Vainqueur has changed hands; but the people of the neighbourhood still talk at times of Mademoiselle Rose's artful Thumb Stroke.

THE END.

PRETTY BABIOLE.

I.

It is on an afternoon in winter, when daylight begins to wane, that you should see the Faubourg Montmartre, one of the most curious thoroughfares of Paris—of modern Paris, be it understood; for this faubourg, almost central now-a-days, when the grand boulevards form the heart of Paris, barely existed a century ago, and antiquologists would waste their time if they searched it for one of the ancient dwellings abounding in the Marais.

The Faubourg Montmartre first rose up in the days when the dancing gardens of the Porcherons flourished—the dancing gardens dear to the Gardes Françaises and grisettes of the latter part of the last century—and it seems to have inherited the popularity of those gay places of revelry. It is mainly frequented by people who live from hand to mouth, who are ever on the move, who go to bed extremely late and eat when they can, for the shops of the provision dealers remain open until two o'clock in the morning.

Comparatively few people reside in the faubourg, but a great many pass along it. At night, it becomes noisy and crowded, just as the neighbouring streets grow silent and deserted, and after midnight it is the rendezvous of disreputable characters of both sexes. At the hour for lighting the street lamps, however, the faubourg is still only a crowded bustling thoroughfare, through which bankers' clerks and collectors eagerly hasten, without feeling the slightest anxiety for the safety of their bags of gold and their note-cases—a street thronged with cabs and drays; in short, a hard-working, honest faubourg.

Such was its aspect about five o'clock one afternoon, late last February, when two young men, who had been walking along side by side, were obliged by a block of vehicles to pause at the corner of the Rue Lafayette. They were both fairly well dressed, and of about the same height; but while one had broad shoulders, and was inclined to stoutness, the other was of slender refined build. The former, moreover, wore a heavy and rather unkempt beard, and the latter only a long, silky moustache. In short, the first was of commonplace appearance; while his companion was distinguished-looking and remarkably handsome. They seemed to be of about the same age. "My dear Louis," remarked the young fellow with the silky moustache, when they had finally succeeded in crossing the street, "I am afraid I sha'n't arrive in time. The office will be closed, and Monsieur Vernelle will refuse to see me. I have a great mind to defer my call until to-morrow."

"You are from the country, my dear André," replied his companion, "so it isn't strange that you should be ignorant of the customs that prevail

among financiers. From three o'clock to five, Monsieur Vernelle is engaged in receiving his brokers' clerks, in looking over the transactions of the day, and signing letters. By five o'clock his work is finished, and that is the most favourable time to approach him—especially when the funds have risen, as is the case to-day. You will find him in a good humour, and your letter of introduction will be favourably received, I feel sure."

"I hope so, indeed; for if I were obliged to return home, without any position or any prospect of one, I don't know what would become of my mother and me. My poor father left us barely anything to live upon. The collapse of the Union Générale reduced him to poverty, and he died of grief, as you know."

"The blow was the more severe as he had been very wealthy, and you had a right to expect a handsome fortune. As for me, my parents were always poor, and I knew that I should be obliged to look out for myself as soon as I left school."

"But now you are comfortable. You are the chief clerk in a prominent mercantile house in the Rue du Sentier, and in a fair way to become a member of the firm, while I still have my apprenticeship to serve, and am by no means sure that I am good for anything."

"Bah! with a fair amount of intelligence, a fellow can succeed in anything; besides, with a face like yours, a man has a chance of captivating his employer's daughter, and marrying her some day. There is no such flattering prospect for me, as I look more like a well-to-do mechanic than anything else; and yet, I don't complain of my fate. Monsieur Vernelle is a kind-hearted man. He won't refuse to give you a lift, and when you once get a place in his banking-house, the rest will depend solely upon yourself. By the way, he has a marriageable daughter."

"I am not so aspiring. I shall be quite content with a clerkship. Heaven grant that he gives me a position, and that I am capable of filling it."

"You do wrong to doubt your ability. Here in Paris a man needs plenty of assurance to prove successful. Say what you have to say boldly, and don't dwell too much on your poverty. But here we are at the Rue Bergère, where Vernelle lives. Do you see that iron gateway down there? That's his house. I will go with you as far as the door, and then wait for you at the café at the corner of the Rue Lafayette. We will dine together, and if you are successful we will celebrate the event with a modest feast—some oysters and a bottle of good wine."

"Nothing would please me better; but I am very much afraid that I sha'n't have a good report to make."

The conversation ceased. André was preparing for the interview which would decide his destiny, and Louis was silent, for fear of disturbing his friend's reflections. Friends, indeed, they were, of long standing, having studied at the same college, though they had lost sight of each other for several years. Louis Marbeuf and André Subligny had been chums at the Lycée Charlemagne; but they did not at that time seem destined to lead the same life, for Marbeuf's father was a hardware dealer who had strained every nerve to send his boy to college, while Subligny was the son of a wealthy ship-owner, who had retired from business with a handsome fortune. Marbeuf, an orphan at the age of eighteen, had begun life as a petty clerk; while Subligny had become one of the leaders of the gilded youth of his native town, dividing his time between Havre and Paris, and squandering the money with which his father kept him lavishly supplied. He had learned to tie a cravat to perfection, to lead a cotillon, and to ride,

but he had entirely forgotten how to work. His father's ruin had fallen like a thunderbolt upon him. The retired ship-owner, in order to pay his debts, sold his estates, his villa at Ingouville, and even his wife's jewels, and then went to live in a little village where he died. André there led a life of privation until his mother decided to send him to Paris with a letter to M. Vernelle, whom she reminded of a service rendered by her husband in former years, and asked for a situation for her son. André had arrived in Paris early that morning, and had slept until noon at his friend Marbeuf's rooms in the Rue Lamartine. Marbeuf had gone to fetch him there, as soon as his day's work was over, and they had set off together bound for M. Vernelle's offices.

Somewhat cheered by his friend's encouragement, André now crossed the courtyard, and after inquiring if the banker could be seen, was ushered into an imposing reception-room, where he handed his card to a footman in a quiet brown livery, on guard at the door of the private office. Several minutes elapsed, and when the footman reappeared to announce that M. Vernelle would see him, the young fellow turned pale with joy and emotion. Entering the private room, he found himself in the presence of a man who was writing at a desk, covered with papers, and who motioned him to be seated, without pausing in his work.

He obeyed, bowing respectfully, and waited, letter in hand, until his father's old friend found time to address him. M. Vernelle was still in the prime of life, though his hair was grey, and his face weary and care-worn. It makes one prematurely old to manage a large banking-house and conduct extensive financial operations. This banker had a cold and severe air, assumed, perhaps, to intimidate petitioners, and André, who had scarcely been honoured with a glance, began to feel very uncomfortable. His card was lying on the table, and he asked himself why M. Vernelle, who must have read the name, did not even condescend to look at him. In fact, the great financier continued to write steadily on, occasionally pausing to think of some word which did not promptly occur to his mind, but without lifting his eyes from the paper. The tick-tack of the pendulum marked the flight of the seconds in the midst of a glacial silence. André's heart sunk lower and lower, and he felt strongly tempted to turn and go off. Suddenly, however, a door opened at the other end of the room, and a gentleman entered carrying several packages of bank-notes. "Here are the eight hundred thousand francs to square Monsieur Bertaud's account," he said, in the monotonous voice of a well-trained cashier.

"All right. Lay the money down. Bertaud won't be here until six o'clock," replied M. Vernelle, without pausing in his writing.

The cashier placed the notes on the desk, within André's reach, and quietly withdrew. M. Vernelle appended his signature to the letter he had been writing, re-read it, folded it, enclosed it in an envelope, and addressed it, then glancing up at André, "What can I do for you, sir?" he coldly asked.

"I am the son of Mr. Charles Subligny, of Havre," stammered the young man.

"I know it. What do you desire of me?"

André presented his mother's letter. As he handed it to the banker, his fingers brushed against the bank-notes—a cruel contrast, for his present and prospective fortune consisted of barely two hundred francs. However, M. Vernelle took the proffered letter, opened it, and began to peruse it without a word. André tried to read on the banker's face what impression was produced by this petition, composed with such infinite care and pains

by his anxious mother. He had the pleasure of seeing that the further M. Vernelle progressed with his reading, the more his stern features relaxed, and when he reached the concluding lines, André, greatly surprised, fancied that his eyes were moist. "So your father met all his obligations?" said the banker.

"All, sir. He died penniless, but free from debt."

"He preferred honour to wealth. That is something unusual in these days."

"Could you doubt his acting thus—you, who knew him in years gone by?" asked André.

"Yes, I knew him, and I knew that he had paid his creditors; but I had heard none of the particulars of the affair. The terrible disaster of last year created a frightful panic in the business world, and I had no opportunity to bestow much attention on such of my acquaintances as were ruined. I was, consequently, not aware that your father and his family had been reduced to poverty through an excess of delicacy on his part—for it certainly was an excess of delicacy—no one would have blamed him for making some provision for his wife and child. I will add, that if he had applied to me, I should certainly have assisted him."

"He thought of doing so, sir, but dared not."

"He did very wrong. Years ago I found myself embarrassed. Had I been as timid as he was, I should probably have collapsed; but I explained my situation to some friends, and not one of them refused to assist me. Your father was one of the most generous of all, and it was chiefly due to him that I passed safely through the crisis, and re-established my business, which has prospered ever since. Your father then lent me a sum of money which he would have done well to have left in my business. But it is useless now to deplore what has passed. Tell me how you have lived since his death."

"My mother has an inalienable income of three thousand francs which was bequeathed to her by a distant relative. This is all we have had to live upon."

"Your mother, your father, and you?" exclaimed the banker with a gesture of astonishment.

"Yes, sir; we left Havre, and went to reside in the country. My poor father died there six months ago. He never rallied from the blow he had received."

"And your mother has bravely endured her unhappy lot! I thank her for writing and recommending you to me. She ought to have done so before. When did you arrive in Paris?"

"This morning, sir; and I should have called upon you immediately, had not a friend, who kindly invited me to share his rooms, told me that you only received persons who wished to see you on business matters prior to five o'clock."

"Your friend was quite right. How old are you?"

"I was twenty-five last month."

"You were educated here in Paris, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what have you been doing since you left school? what profession have you chosen?" André's heart failed him. M. Vernelle had placed his finger on the weak spot of his armour. "None, I suppose," continued the banker.

"I was anxious to enter the diplomatic service," replied the young man,

with evident embarrassment. "There seemed to be nothing to prevent me from doing so. My father was rich, so I could do what I liked, but afterwards time slipped by without my taking any decisive step."

"You no doubt had little taste for business?"

"I did not think of it at that time. My father retired several years before I left college, so I could not take his place, and . . ."

"Then you have done nothing whatever up to the present time?"

André now felt that there was, indeed, no hope for him, for all M. Vernelle's questions seemed intended to convince him of his unfitness to hold any position in a large banking-house. But the idea of parrying this thrust with a falsehood never once occurred to him. "What you say is true, sir," he replied, after a short pause. "I frankly admit that I have lived in absolute idleness. My father allowed me the greatest possible freedom. I abused it, and indulged freely in pleasure; but I now bitterly regret squandering money which would have greatly benefited my mother. However," added André, straightening himself up proudly, "I am positive that I have never committed a mean or dishonourable act. I have sinned through thoughtlessness and ignorance. I fancied that I should come into possession of a large fortune. This turned my head a little, but my heart is not spoiled."

"I believe you," replied M. Vernelle. "Good blood will show itself, and you belong to a family which has never been wanting in honour. I can readily excuse your faults, and I think all the better of you for not having concealed them from me. Hypocrisy is the worst of all vices, in my opinion. You have been a spoiled child. You must now make a man of yourself, and I am ready to help you in the effort."

"Oh, sir! you save me."

"Don't thank me. I am only repaying a debt of gratitude—an old obligation. Besides, I have taken a liking to you at first sight. I have no intention of employing you in my offices, however. You have had none of the training which is indispensable to a good clerk, nor would such a position suit you. I have a better one to offer you. Will you be my private secretary?"

"I!" exclaimed André.

"Yes, you," replied M. Vernelle. "I have long been looking for an intelligent, well-bred young man, whom I could initiate into my private affairs. Any clerks can attend to my business correspondence; but I need a man like yourself for my private correspondence. While working you will soon acquire the knowledge and experience you now lack. You will learn how to conduct gigantic financial operations, and I feel sure that you will make your way. I, myself, began in a much more humble position."

André, deeply touched, was about to burst forth into vehement protestations of gratitude, when a valet entered on tiptoe, and said a few words to M. Vernelle in a low tone. "Very well, I am coming," his master replied. André now rose to go, but the banker motioned him to reseal himself, remarking: "Remain, my young friend. I must explain to you more fully what your duties will be. My daughter wishes to see me, so I must leave you for a moment, but I should like you to wait for me."

André bowed and resumed his seat near the table, while M. Vernelle left the room.

He was overcome with joy, this brave André, and he certainly had cause to be. He had entered the great financier's office, nervous and trembling,

and now he was offered a situation he had not even dared to dream of. "My mother's life will be henceforth one of ease," he thought, "and it is to me she will owe it. When I think how she hesitated to apply to this kind-hearted man because she feared she might only expose me to useless humiliation! But he has a heart of gold, although apparently cold and haughty. He has treated me as if I were his son. It will not suffice to serve him faithfully. I should like to be rich some day, so as to prove my gratitude by doing for him what my father did some years ago. But this is a wish that never will be realized," added André. "Monsieur Vernelle is the possessor of millions, and I have absolutely nothing. He will retire from business before even I have made a quarter of the amount that is lying here on the table before me—eight hundred thousand francs!"

As he spoke, he glanced at the pile of bank-notes before him—glanced at it, not covetously, but with genuine curiosity. André had squandered a good deal of money, but he had never before seen so large an amount gathered together in so small a compass, for the notes were new ones, and had been subjected to the action of a press. "Eight hundred thousand francs!" he repeated, and, almost unconsciously, he picked up one of the eight packages to see what process had been employed to reduce a hundred thousand francs' worth of notes to the dimensions of a folded cambric handkerchief. On examination, he perceived that the package was formed of ten smaller packets of ten thousand francs each, carefully pinned, and then tied together with a silken cord. The package was still in his hand, and he was engaged in weighing it, when the door by which M. Vernelle had left the room suddenly reopened. There are decisive moments when a man's honour and life depend upon the quickness of a movement.

André could not replace the package on the pile from which he had just taken it without being seen by M. Vernelle; and what would the latter think of the young fellow's ill-timed curiosity in handling wealth which did not belong to him? André quite lost his head, and in his confusion and bewilderment, hastily concealed the notes in his trousers' pocket, which was hidden from view by the desk. The act was as involuntary as a recoil on the duelling ground, and he had not time to calculate its consequences. Immediately afterwards he rose up. He was very pale, and his limbs trembled under him, but M. Vernelle perceived nothing; besides, the young fellow's confusion might reasonably be imputed to the unexpected entrance of a young girl the banker brought with him. "My daughter Clémence insisted upon seeing you," said M. Vernelle, smiling, "and I can refuse her nothing. She is absolute mistress here; moreover, as you are destined to meet very frequently since you now belong to the establishment, I thought it would be well for you to make each other's acquaintance at once."

André bowed awkwardly. He scarcely dared to lift his eyes, and yet he had perceived that his employer's daughter was marvellously lovely. She was a blonde, with delicate features, and large blue eyes of wonderfully sweet expression; and, like André, she was tall and slender, without being thin. The pair might readily have been mistaken for brother and sister. "Oh! how strongly you resemble your father, sir!" exclaimed the girl, clapping her hands.

"What! mademoiselle, did you know him?" said André, greatly astonished.

"He always called to see us when he came to Paris, and when I was a child he used to give me any number of toys. Why did he never bring you to see us?"

André did not know what to reply. He managed, however, to stammer out some excuse, and to express regrets which were certainly sincere, for he thought Mademoiselle Vernelle charming, and said to himself that he would perhaps have quieted down sooner had he met her before.

"You have had the misfortune to lose him," she continued, "and without knowing you, I sympathised with you in your bereavement; I thank you for having thought of us."

André, surprised by this warm reception, looked timidly at M. Vernelle, who was smiling on his daughter. It was evident that he adored her, that she was his joy, his consolation, his hope. It was evident, too, that he would never thwart her inclinations, but unhesitatingly accept the man of her choice as his son-in-law. What a brilliant prospect for André, to whom she seemed to have taken a strong liking! However, the young fellow was in no condition to enjoy the unalloyed satisfaction which such unexpected good fortune ought to have caused him. He could only think of the senseless act which he had committed, and he was anxiously asking himself what he could do to avert its consequences. The accursed package of notes was in his pocket, and it seemed to him that it weighed a hundred pounds. To produce it, throw it on the table, and falling on his knees implore M. Vernelle's forgiveness for his momentary folly, would have been the heroic course, and, perhaps, he would have had courage to adopt it, had he been alone with the banker. But in Mademoiselle Vernelle's presence he would have died of shame. On the other hand, to take the money away with him would be stealing. This thought horrified him, but a fresh idea somewhat calmed his anxiety. "M. Vernelle brought his daughter here," he thought, "and he will probably accompany her to her own apartments when she leaves. If I am left alone again, if only for an instant, I can put the money back on the table. It will suffice for him to turn his back while he escorts her to the door."

"You do not answer me, now," continued Clémence in a musical voice that moved André to the depths of his inmost heart. "Speak, father, since Monsieur Subdigny seems to be afraid of me. It is the first time in my life that I ever intimidated any one," she added laughing. "I did not know that I was so awe-inspiring."

M. Vernelle stepped up to André and took his hand—the very hand that had abstracted the hundred thousand francs, and said: "My dear lad, you see that every one here wishes you to be my secretary, so accept the position I offer you. It is not a very brilliant one, I admit, nor is it a sinecure, by any means. You will have plenty to do; though at first you will only write from my dictation; but by-and-bye, when you have become acquainted with my correspondents, and my business, I shall intrust my private correspondence entirely to you."

"The idea of declining your kind offer never occurred to me for an instant," replied André, with deep emotion; "and I regret that you require no more of me, for I would gladly make any sacrifice to serve you."

"That opportunity may be offered at some future day," said the banker, with a pleasant smile. "Now let us come to an understanding. Will you be ready to enter upon your duties to-morrow?"

"Quite ready," muttered André, shuddering as he thought, "I shall kill myself before to-morrow, if I don't find an opportunity of restoring the money I have taken."

"Then you will find me here at nine o'clock. I will introduce you to my cashier, and to my head book-keeper. They both know what a high

reputation for integrity your father left behind him, and you will find them kindly disposed towards you."

"How grateful—"

"Wait—I have not yet enumerated all your duties. I lunch at twelve o'clock, and you will lunch with me."

"And with me, if you please," said Mademoiselle Clémence, archly.

"Not every day, mademoiselle," said the father, with pretended sternness. "We shall often have to discuss business matters, Monsieur Subigny and I, and in that case you would be in the way."

"I confess that business matters possess very little interest for me."

"At five o'clock," continued the banker, addressing André, "you will be free, unless you feel inclined to devote your evening to us, in which case you will dine with us."

"And I always honour the dinner-table with my presence," exclaimed Clémence.

Had André's mind been in its normal condition, he would have thanked the banker in a few simple, but well chosen words; but he was half demented, for the moment of his departure was fast approaching, and the young lady, whose absence would have enabled him to rid himself of those terrible bank-notes, seemed determined to remain until the close of the interview. "There is still one point which we have not yet touched upon," resumed the banker; "the amount of salary you are to receive."

"I shall be perfectly satisfied with whatever you are willing to give me," said André, eagerly.

"No doubt; but I prefer to be explicit. I shall pay you five hundred francs a month to begin with. You must be in a position to render your mother some little assistance. You will write to her this evening, will you not?"

"It is too late for post, but I shall send her a telegram."

"Very good. You are staying with one of your friends, I think you told me."

"Yes; with Louis Marbeuf, an old schoolfellow."

"You must have some rooms for yourself, and have them suitably furnished. I will attend to the matter. But now good-bye until to-morrow, my dear André. I won't detain you any longer, for I am expecting one of my principal clients who is to come and fetch the money you see there." André's legs trembled under him. This was the final blow. The owner of the eight hundred thousand francs would come, count his money, and discover that one package of bank-notes was missing. André felt that he must leave at once in order to avoid the scene that would inevitably ensue; for he alone could have taken the money—and that he must go without restoring it, for the young lady showed no signs of leaving the room. He opened his lips to confess his fault, but an iron hand seemed to grasp his throat, and the words would not come. Mademoiselle Vernelle was looking at him, and her look paralysed his tongue: "*Au revoir, Monsieur André,*" said the young girl, pleasantly, while her father gently pushed him towards the door, after cordially pressing his hand.

As André entered the waiting-room, it seemed to him as though the voice of conscience cried aloud: "You are a thief!" He staggered like a drunken man, so perceptibly, in fact, that the footman, who had risen to escort him to the outer door, inquired if he were ill. This footman was still another obstacle in the way of reparation, for André had thought of throwing the package on a chair or table where some member of the house-

hold would see it and return it to the banker. "I will drop it on the stairs," he said to himself, as he left the waiting-room.

But this plan likewise proved futile, for he was not halfway downstairs when he heard some footsteps behind him. The cashier was leaving for the day, and out of politeness, probably, he abstained from passing the visitor whom he had seen, a short time before, in his employer's private room. André consequently had to leave the house with the fatal package still in his pocket, and with that same terrible voice repeating in his ears: "A man has offered you a helping hand in your adversity, and you have robbed him—for it is robbery merely to touch money that does not belong to you. And now, whether you live or whether you die, his daughter, who welcomed you as a brother, will know that you are a scoundrel; for even if you have courage to kill yourself, your body will be taken to the Morgue, and the bank-notes you have abstracted will be found upon your person. Monsieur Vernelle will recognise them as his property, without a doubt, for they are all new notes, fresh from the bank; and you will cause your mother's death, for she will die of grief and mortification on learning that you were a thief."

As André reached the gateway he paused, and the cashier stepped past him, bowing as he did so. André, relieved of this dangerous witness, would, probably, have retraced his steps, had not a gentleman, to whom the cashier also bowed, just then entered the courtyard; and this gentleman was, in all probability, the capitalist who had come to fetch the large sum lying upon M. Vernelle's desk. This crushed the unfortunate youth's last hope, and he darted like a madman along the Rue Bergère. He felt inclined to throw himself into the Seine. "And yet," he thought, "it would be better for me to return the notes in a letter, in which I will confess everything to Monsieur Vernelle, and tell him that he will never see me again. But to whom shall I intrust the letter? I cannot confide it to a common messenger, for it might never reach its destination. No, nothing is left for me but to die. But I am determined not to be carried to the Morgue. I will kill myself at home."

He had scarcely made this desperate resolve when he recollected that Marbeuf was waiting for him at a café near-by. Had he any right to put an end to his life without seeing his friend again, without pressing his hand for the last time, and without begging him to defend his memory, and to explain, to all those who knew him, that he had killed himself to expiate a crime unwittingly committed? No, it was his duty to confess everything to his friend, and to commend his mother to his care.

His mother? Far away in the little hamlet where she had sought a refuge, she was anxiously waiting for the letter which André had promised to write to her as soon as his interview with M. Vernelle was over. She was counting the hours. And instead of good news, she would receive her son's last farewell. It would be enough, and more than enough to kill her.

"No," murmured André, as he made his way through the crowd in the Faubourg Montmartre, "no, I must beg Louis to go to Havre. His employers won't refuse him two days' leave. He can see her and try to console her; for though he is a little rough in manner, he has an excellent heart."

These reflections, and others of a similar nature, engrossed André's mind until he reached the corner of the Rue Drouet, whence he saw Marbeuf seated at a small table in front of the café chosen as their place of meeting. Just then a gentleman passed by, and André fancied he recognized the

cashier whom he had already seen on the staircase, as he was leaving Monsieur Vernelle's room. It mattered little, however, to André whether it was he or not; he felt no curiosity in regard to him. Crossing the street, he sank upon a chair beside Marbeuf, who eagerly inquired: "Well, did you succeed?" Receiving no response, Louis gloomily resumed: "I see by your face that the banker snubbed you. I expected it. Rich men have no feeling. I don't believe this one even granted you a hearing."

"You are very much mistaken," replied André, bitterly. "I had only to send in my card to obtain an interview."

"And after reading your mother's letter, he assumed a heart-broken air, and assured you, wrapping the bitter pill in plenty of honeyed words, that he could do nothing whatever for you. That is always the way."

"You do Monsieur Vernelle great injustice. The letter seemed to touch him deeply. There were tears in his eyes as he read it."

"Then his tears probably lie very near the surface. It would have been more to the purpose had he offered you a place in his establishment."

"He offered me something better."

"What? pecuniary aid, or a recommendation to a fellow-banker?"

"Neither. He asked me to act as his private secretary. I can enter upon my duties at nine o'clock to-morrow morning if I like."

"And the salary?"

"I am to have five hundred francs a month, to begin with."

"Zounds! you are in luck! I have been working seven years, and I don't get as much as that yet. And did Vernelle promise you advancement, besides?"

"He gave me to understand that he would take care of my future, and that from this day forth I should be treated as one of his family. I am to lunch with him every day."

"And still you are not satisfied! You certainly must be hard to please."

"His daughter, too, came in while I was there, and he introduced me to her."

"That caps the climax! See if you don't marry her some day. She is charming, isn't she?"

"Adorable! And she spoke very affectionately of my father, whom she seems to have seen very often in former years."

"This is surely a most promising beginning. Mark my words: in less than two years' time you will be Monsieur Vernelle's son-in-law and partner. But how is it that you come here with a most lugubrious countenance, when in point of fact your fortune is made? What is the meaning of this farce? I think it in very bad taste. I am your friend. I thought I had convinced you of that, and yet you treat me like a stranger."

"You will forgive my dejection when you learn the cause of it."

"Indeed! What is the matter with you?"

"My only course is to put a bullet through my brain or drown myself. When I left Monsieur Vernelle's I was strongly tempted to go straight to the river instead of coming here."

"You want to kill yourself! Has your good fortune turned your brain?"

"No. I haven't lost my mind, and it is for that very reason that I am resolved to put an end to my life. You think me very lucky, and you are rejoicing over my good fortune. Ah, well! I return to you dishonoured. I am a thief."

"A thief! What do you mean by that joke?"

"I am a thief, I tell you! While I was in the banker's private office, the cashier came in and laid a large package of bank-notes on the table. A moment afterwards Monsieur Vernelle went out, leaving me alone in the room."

"And you yielded to the temptation?"

"No. The devil impelled me probably, for I picked up one of the packages of notes to see how much a fortune would weigh. Monsieur Vernelle returned almost instantly, and I hadn't time to put the money back where I found it; in fact, in my bewilderment, I involuntarily slipped the package into my trousers' pocket."

"Did Vernelle see you do it?"

"No; he had no suspicion, for he redoubled his kind attentions and promises of assistance."

"But why didn't you tell him the truth and return the money?"

"His daughter was present; he had brought her with him, and I couldn't summon up courage. I couldn't bear the thought of being compelled to blush before her."

"But it will be far worse to be arrested. Vernelle will count his money, and as you were the only person in the office—"

"He will enter a complaint against me, and I shall go where thieves go. You see there is nothing left for me but to die."

The expression of Marbeuf's face had undergone a decided change. Its severity was truly ominous. "Even death won't save you from dishonour," he said, after a painful silence. "Some other plan must be devised."

"I have tried to think of one, but in vain," replied André, sadly. "I am lost, I realize it, and I am resigned to my fate. I would rather die than go to prison, but I should first like to restore the money I have stolen."

"I should hope so, indeed," replied Marbeuf, almost sulkily. "What is the amount?"

"I do not know exactly. I have not dared to touch it since I put it in my pocket. It is a package made up of several smaller packets secured by pins, and tied together with a bit of silk."

"Then the amount is one hundred thousand francs," said Marbeuf, who sometimes went to the bank to draw money for his employer. "And it was the cashier who brought this money into the room, you say?"

"Yes, there was eight hundred thousand francs in all, and a gentleman was to call for them at six o'clock—a Monsieur Bertaud—"

"Bertaud, I know him. He is very rich, but he isn't a man to take money without counting it, and he will be pitiless. He once dismissed a subordinate for making a mistake of six hundred francs in the settlement of an account."

"And by this time he must have discovered that there were one hundred thousand francs deficient, for I think I met him at the gateway, as I was coming out."

"The deuce! then there is no time to lose. Still, I am sure that Vernelle won't act hastily. He will question his cashier, and the clerk who went to the Bank of France for the notes—for they must have come from the bank—Vernelle wouldn't be likely to keep so much money in his safe. Now neither the cashier nor the clerk is at hand, for the office is closed, and all the employés have gone home."

"Yes, the cashier left just as I did."

"And he won't return this evening, so we have until to-morrow."

"Then you hope to extricate me from this frightful position?"

Marbeuf gazed searchingly at his unfortunate friend, who hung his head like a criminal in the presence of his judge. "Listen, André," said the young clerk at last. "I swear to you that if I thought you guilty, even in thought, I would abandon you to your fate, and never speak to you again. Integrity is my only wealth, for I have no protector, and have nothing to hope for except from my industry and good conduct." André was greatly affected by this reproof which he had richly deserved, but he made no protest. "I feel sure, however, that you have told me the truth," continued Marbeuf; "for if you were dishonest, you wouldn't have confessed your fault. It is grave, very grave, and it may have consequences that you haven't foreseen. Innocent parties may be accused of the theft—"

"I know it, and I would rather denounce myself than be the cause of such a calamity."

"Denounce yourself! That is what you had better do, perhaps. I must admit, however, that it would cost you the esteem of Monsieur Vernelle and his daughter, for you would lose it—no business man would ever believe that you had taken this money unintentionally. Other people's money is sacred, and ought not to be touched under any pretext whatsoever." André remained silent, and tears coursed down his cheeks.

"I will not demand such a cruel sacrifice of you, however," resumed Marbeuf, "and I don't despair of saving you. I have a plan, but I am not yet sure whether it is feasible, for there are a few questions I should like to ask you. But let us have some dinner."

"Dinner, you can think of dinner!"

"Yes, certainly. I have no fortune in my pocket to worry me, and I feel hungry. If you don't care to eat, you can at least sit at table and tell me what I wish to know while I am taking in sustenance."

Marbeuf had already called the waiter and paid for the appetizer he had partaken of while waiting for his friend. He now rose, and led André towards the corner of the Rue Lafayette and the Faubourg Montmartre where there was one of the cheap restaurants known in Paris as "*Etablissements de Bouillon*." They went upstairs, and sat down at a white marble table, where Marbeuf's order was promptly taken by a neat waitress with a white apron. Most of the surrounding tables were already occupied; and as new-comers, in accordance with the prevailing custom, might soon install themselves at theirs, Marbeuf decided to profit of the few moments of comparative isolation that remained. "You wish to restore the money, do you not?" said he, "and restore it without letting Monsieur Vernelle know that it is you who have made restitution?"

"Yes, certainly; but how can that be managed? To whom can I intrust this money which I myself cannot return under penalty of discovery? I might send it by post—"

"That would be the worst of methods. You could not register the letter without giving your name and address; and if you only throw the package into an ordinary letter-box it may never reach its destination. No, I have something better to suggest. At what time does this banker dine?"

"How can you expect me to know?" replied André.

"That's true; he hasn't yet invited you to dinner. However, he must dine at about seven o'clock, so I should be almost sure to find him at home when I leave here."

"What! you are willing to—"

"Yes, I have a plan which may prove practicable. I will go to Vernelle, and tell him that in the courtyard of his house I have found a package of bank-notes which is probably his property, and which I therefore return to him. I shall take care to mention the place where I picked the money up. It will be at the foot of the staircase used by the clerks. I am familiar with the interior of the establishment, having been sent there several times by my employer. My story will sound very plausible, and Vernelle won't doubt it for an instant. He will think that the messenger dropped one of the packages, and that his cashier failed to notice the loss on receiving the money."

"But he will ask your name?"

"That is more than probable, but I shan't be foolish enough to tell it, or to accept the reward he will certainly offer me. If I disclose my name, he will ultimately find out that I am a friend of yours, and in that case suspect that I have acted on your behalf. I shall positively refuse to tell him who I am, and if he insists, why, I shall give him some fictitious name. But he will believe me, for I assure you that I shall play my part to perfection. If you will play yours equally well, there will be no trouble."

"My part! I don't understand you," said André.

"Vernelle mustn't suspect you, so you must go to his place to-morrow at the appointed hour."

"I am by no means sure that I shall have the courage to do so."

"But you must. If you fail to keep your appointment, Vernelle will speedily understand that my pretended finding of the money was only invented to conceal your guilt, for at this very moment he is probably saying to himself that you must be the person who took the money."

"I know that, and the mere thought of it fills me with shame."

"You must exercise more self-control. Your employer will receive you cordially, as the money will have been restored before you present yourself; but it is more than likely that he will tell you of the singular circumstance. If he speaks of the notes, try to repress all signs of emotion. All my trouble will be lost if you don't keep your wits about you."

"I will do my best, but I cannot vouch for success," muttered André.

"In any case I must see you again before I risk a visit to Vernelle's office, for if you fail, or if any unforeseen circumstance occurs—"

"You will be informed of the result this evening. Go straight to my rooms when we leave here, and I will join you there in an hour—or perhaps two hours' time. That depends upon whether I find Vernelle at home. In any case I shan't return until after I have restored him this money. You have only to wait for me."

"In an agony of suspense, as you may imagine."

"Yes, but if I succeed, as I am sure I shall, you will get off very easily. Come, here is the key of my apartments. Hand me the notes, while we are still alone at the table, and while no one is looking at us."

André asked nothing better than to be relieved of a burden that weighed much more heavily on his conscience than on his person. He took the key, and handed the package to Marbeuf, who hastily put it out of sight. But suddenly André turned pale, and whispered: "I am lost! Monsieur Vernelle's cashier is here. He has seen us, and he may have overheard us."

"Are you sure that you are not mistaken?"

"Perfectly sure. He entered Monsieur Vernelle's office while I was there, and I met him again on the stairs as I was leaving the house. He

must have taken the same route that I did, for he passed me again at the corner of the Faubourg Montmartre."

"What if he has been following you?"

"I think not. Besides, he can know nothing about the affair, as he left Monsieur Vernelle's house at the same time as I did. You can see him without turning round—look—that heavily-bearded man dining alone at the table on the opposite side of the room."

"Yes, I can see him. He has a prosperous air, and I am surprised to see him at a restaurant of this class. He must have a good salary, and yet he contents himself with a bit of boiled beef, some Gruyère cheese, and two penn'orth of wine. He must be of an economical disposition."

André listened, without saying a word, fearing that he might attract the attention of this dangerous neighbour. However, the person referred to did not seem to notice the two friends. He was at least forty years of age, and very dark. He wore a neatly-fitting black frock-coat, an irreproachable necktie, and a tasteful pair of fancy trousers. "He seems to be more of a fop than an epicure," remarked Marbeuf, who was still watching him furtively; "and he isn't generous, for he has given nothing to the waitress. He is going now. Well, I can't say that I regret him."

"But he saw me hand you the bank-notes."

"Nonsense! you only imagine that. In fact, I doubt very much if he has even recognised you. Besides, he is too far off to be able to see whether you gave me a package of notes or an old newspaper. Thousand-franc notes, or, indeed, bank-notes of any description are not very common here. So don't be uneasy. My plan will prove successful, never fear." And beckoning to the waitress, Marbeuf gave her a gratuity, and rose to go.

He had eaten but little, and André had scarcely touched any of the dishes his companion had ordered. They went downstairs. Marbeuf settled the score at the counter, and on reaching the pavement, turned to André, saying: "It is now half-past eight, and I have a good chance of finding Vernelle still at home. I must leave you now, so good-bye. I hope to see you again within an hour's time."

André turned away with a bursting heart and wildly throbbing brain. Marbeuf, on his side, was by no means as sure of the success of his scheme as he pretended. Moreover, in spite of his determination to maintain his incognito, the banker might have him followed after the interview, learn who he was, and inform his employers of the rather suspicious part he had played in this affair. But this consideration was not of a nature to deter him. He was particularly anxious to extricate his friend from peril. So he hurried on towards the Rue Bergère. As it was very near the restaurant, it took him but ten minutes to reach the house where Subigny had so foolishly imperilled his future. The gate of the courtyard was closed. Marbeuf at once rang at a side-door, which was reserved for M. Vernelle's private use. The ring was answered by a footman, who declared that his master did not receive that evening, but on Marbeuf insisting and swearing that he came on a matter of great importance, the lackey vouchsafed the information that M. Vernelle had gone with mademoiselle to see a new play at the Renaissance Theatre. The banker's absence deranged all Marbeuf's carefully-laid plans. How could he gain an entrance to M. Vernelle's box? and how could he restore the money in the daughter's presence? The situation was so embarrassing that Marbeuf wondered for a moment if it would not be safer and easier to state the case to the servant, and intrust the money to him. This man was not acquainted with him, so that M.

Vernelle would never know who had made this restitution. Still, the banker might suppose that it had been made by André; and, moreover, footmen are not above temptation, and this one might appropriate the money. After a little reflection, Marbeuf decided to keep the money in his pocket and try his luck at the Renaissance.

He hastened on towards the theatre, choosing the shortest route, which was along the Rue de l'Echiquier, a street which, although greatly crowded in the daytime, becomes almost deserted at night, all the shops being closed at eight o'clock. Marbeuf walked on rapidly without looking behind; but it suddenly occurred to him that, in order to make his story seem the more plausible, the bank-notes ought to be a little soiled, and as there is plenty of dirt in the Rue de l'Echiquier, he stooped down to rub them gently on the ground. When he raised his head again, he was surprised to see, but a few steps off, a man in a blouse and a soft felt hat, the latter pulled down over his eyes. The idea that this man was watching his movements occurred to him, still he walked quietly on. After proceeding a little further, he glanced back and saw that the man was certainly following him, and even quickening his pace to overtake him. However, he was not alarmed. What had he to fear at nine o'clock in the evening, in a central part of Paris? Besides, this person certainly could not know that he had a hundred thousand francs in his pocket. So he walked on briskly until he abruptly encountered an obstacle. Across the sidewalk there was one of those deep trenches which have occasioned so many accidents in Paris. Marbeuf did not perceive it until it was under his nose, and then he, of course, hastily stepped back, but at this moment the man in the blouse, who had begun to run, jostled Marbeuf in passing with such violence that André's messenger fell head foremost into the trench, where he lay as if stunned or dead. It was decreed that the hundred thousand francs should not be replaced in M. Vernelle's safe that night.

II.

WHILE Marbeuf met with this adventure in trying to save his friend from dishonour, André slowly returned to Louis' rooms. He was in no haste, for he foresaw that he would have to wait a long time for his friend's return, nor was he at all sanguine as to the success of the venture. All his gloomy forebodings had returned with increased force, and he felt inclined to linger in the street and try to divert his thoughts, if possible, with the noise and confusion around him. Accordingly, he chose the longest route to reach Marbeuf's abode, which was situated at the end of the Rue Lamartine, near the church of Notre Dame de Lorette. André proceeded slowly up the Rue Lafayette with his head bowed upon his breast, and his mind oppressed by the remembrance of his fault. He had just reached the corner of the Rue Montholon, when a young woman brushed past him, closely followed by a man who seemed to be trying to talk to her, but whom she apparently refused to listen to, for she was quickening her pace as if to avoid him. It was one of those incidents of the Paris streets which usually attract but little attention, as, nine times out of ten, the victim is not worthy of protection. The person who had just passed André was very young. She carried a large bandbox in her hand, and she was very plainly dressed. She turned into the Rue Montholon, which happened to be deserted for the moment, and the man, probably emboldened by this circum-

stance, tried to slip his arm round her waist. Though violently repulsed, he was about to return to the charge, when André at last decided to interfere. Overtaking the pair with a few hurried strides, he pushed the man on one side, and offered his arm to the girl, who accepted it without a word. The man was apparently afraid to engage in a quarrel, for he slunk away with a muttered oath. André had barely caught a glimpse of his face, and yet it seemed to him that this was not the first time he had seen him. However, he determined to extricate himself at once from this rather embarrassing position. He had undertaken the defence of a *grisette*, but he wished the matter to end there, and he was about to withdraw his arm when she said to him: "I thank you, monsieur, for having come to my assistance. Pray do not leave me yet. I live only a short distance off. Won't you have the kindness to accompany me to my door?" The girl's invitation seemed rather bold, but her voice was so sweet, and her manner so frank, that any doubt of her intentions was impossible.

"Certainly, mademoiselle," replied André, courteously. "You must have been very frightened?"

"Oh, I am accustomed to these disagreeable adventures. Men imagine I will listen to them, but I generally know how to get rid of them. However, I must confess that I was rather afraid this time; that man was such a coarse creature."

"He won't trouble you while I am with you."

"No, men of his class are invariably cowards. I am very glad that you freed me from his clutches."

"But why do you go out alone in the evening?"

"Because there is no one to accompany me home from the shop. My parents are dead, and my only living relative is an uncle, who is busy all day, and who hasn't time to escort me home, for he is often obliged to work till ten o'clock at night. I only see him on Sundays."

"And you have no lover?"

"I haven't time for one," replied the girl, laughing. "Besides I don't want any."

André thought it best to drop a conversation which threatened to become too personal, and the girl did not attempt to renew it. They had passed the Rue Rochechouart, and were walking up the Rue Lamartine, when she abruptly let go of his arm, and exclaimed: "Here I am at my own door, sir. Let me thank you once more, and bid you good-night."

"What! do you live here?" exclaimed André, recognising the door of the house in which his friend Marbeuf resided.

"Yes, sir; on the fourth floor."

"So do I."

"Impossible! I've never seen you before."

"I only arrived in Paris this morning, and am stopping for the present with a friend."

"With Monsieur Marbeuf, then? Oh, I know him very well, at least, by sight—his windows overlook the courtyard, like mine. We live directly opposite each other, and our doors open on the same landing. But we don't visit each other. Your friend seems rather reserved." André made no reply. He took the remark for an invitation, and did not wish to commit himself. "However, I am seldom or never at home," continued the girl, who had perhaps read his thoughts. "Now will you kindly allow me to go in first? Our doorkeeper is a great gossip, and if she sees me coming in with you, she will talk about it for a month."

"You are right, mademoiselle," replied André, stepping aside to let her pass.

The door was open, and the girl, a little surprised by his coldness, bowed to him slightly, and disappeared up the passage. A few moments later André entered in his turn. His former doubts and fears again assailed him; and he had already ceased to think of the girl who had momentarily made him forget that his fate was being decided.

Marbeuf's apartments consisted of four very modestly furnished rooms. The one André occupied contained a camp bedstead, a few cane-seated chairs, a chest of drawers, and a writing-table. Upon the wall hung a few photographs, a cuckoo clock, a revolver, and two or three old engravings. André, before lighting a candle, noticed, through the uncurtained window, another lighted window on the other side of the narrow courtyard—in all probability it was that of the girl whom he had just met. He did not stop to look at it, however; but seated himself at the table to await his friend's return. He had left the key in the door so that Marbeuf might enter without ringing, for he felt overcome with fatigue, and feared that he might drop asleep in spite of the anxiety that tormented him. Indeed, after a short struggle his eyes closed, and his head sunk upon his right arm which was resting on the table.

When he awoke he was still alone, and his first thought was to ascertain the time. Rising to look at the cuckoo clock that hung on the wall, he found that it was a quarter to twelve o'clock, and that Marbeuf had not yet returned. "I am lost!" he exclaimed. "Louis hasn't succeeded in deceiving Monsieur Vernelle, and he does not like to bring me news of his failure. If he hadn't found the banker at home he would have returned to reassure me. What can have happened to him?"

A most unworthy suspicion now flashed through his mind. Could Marbeuf have merely offered him his services in order to obtain possession of the hundred thousand francs? However he harboured the thought only for an instant. He knew that Marbeuf's honesty was above suspicion. Could anyone have murdered him, in order to obtain possession of the money? That was by no means impossible in these days of daring robberies.

"However it may be, the only thing left for me is to die," said André, gloomily, and he involuntarily turned to the revolver hanging on the wall. He took it down, examined it, and found that it was loaded.

"That is fortunate," he murmured. "When the clock strikes twelve I will blow my brains out."

He was mad, for he did not even think of writing to his mother. Revolver in hand, he stood watching the hands as they moved on, and counted the moments that were left for him to live. The ticking of the pendulum resounded loudly in his ears, and at last he heard the creaking sound that announced the striking of the clock; then raising the pistol to his forehead, he was about to pull the trigger, when he heard the door open. "It is he! it is Marbeuf!" he exclaimed, lowering his weapon.

But it was not Marbeuf, and André uttered a cry of surprise. The girl he had protected stood before him, pale, agitated, and evidently very much embarrassed at her intrusion into a neighbour's apartments at such an unreasonable hour. Nor was her reception calculated to reassure her. "What do you want?" André inquired, angrily, advancing to bar her passage. But she entered in spite of him. "Will you answer me?" he roughly added. "I warn you that you are wasting your time here."

"Oh, don't misjudge me, sir," she said, imploringly, with tears in her eyes.

"Speak, then, and tell me what you want," replied André, slightly appeased by her entreating manner. She still hesitated, but at last, in a voice that trembled with emotion, she asked: "Why do you wish to die?"

"You are mad," replied André.

"No, for from my window I saw you rise, approach the clock, see what time it was, take the revolver—"

"How dare you play the spy on me?"

"No, no. I assure you that it was only by chance that I happened to see you. There are no curtains to your window."

"Why were you not in bed? It is now more than three hours since you returned home."

"I had a bonnet to trim. We are very busy at the shop just now. I had only just finished my work and was going to bed when I noticed that there was a light in your room."

"And because you saw me with a revolver in my hand, you fancied I was going to kill myself. You have a very vivid imagination, *mademoiselle*."

"I hope I was mistaken, I am sure; but why are you so pale? Pray, tell me the truth. Some misfortune has befallen you."

"What right have you to meddle with my affairs?" asked André, impatiently.

"Didn't you meddle with mine?" replied the girl, gently. "You didn't know me, and yet you protected me from a man who insulted me. You are no longer a stranger in my eyes."

Struck by these words, André threw the pistol on the table, saying to himself: "I shall have plenty of time between now and to-morrow to blow my brains out, and if Marbeuf returns, this girl will have saved my life."

"You were mistaken in regard to the object of my visit," the girl continued. "If you knew who I am—"

"The fact is I know nothing at all about you," replied André, somewhat ironically.

"Allow me to tell you, then; but permit me first to take a seat. My emotion has overpowered me." She took a chair while André remained standing, with his arms crossed over his chest. "In the first place, I am only sixteen," she began, almost gaily. "It would certainly be very unfortunate if I behaved improperly at my age, and I assure you that I have no desire to do so. I was brought up much better than many of my employer's customers. My parents were in business, and had they lived, I should not now be working in a milliner's shop."

"Ah!" thought André, "I am about to listen once more to the pleasing fiction which all *grisettes* relate to gentlemen to prevent them from believing that they were born in hovels."

"But unfortunately my father was ruined by a man who betrayed his confidence," continued the girl, "and if I told you how he died—you would understand the horror I felt when I saw you with that revolver in your hand."

"What, did he kill himself?"

"Yes, in a paroxysm of despair, forgetting that he might retrieve his losses by patient industry, and that he would leave his wife in poverty. My poor mother died, after struggling along six months—"

The girl paused. Sobs choked her utterance. "Calm yourself, made-

noiselle," said André, touched by her grief, and struck by the analogy between her fate and his own.

"Forgive me, sir," she said, dashing away her tears. "I ought not to give way to my grief before you, for you must have sorrow enough to bear—I ought, on the contrary, to try and make you forget your troubles—but whenever I think of my mother my feelings overpower me."

"Tell me about yourself."

"So be it. I was still at school when I lost my father. My mother was, of course, obliged to take me away, and she apprenticed me to a milliner. On her death I was left alone in the world—no, I had an uncle, as I have already told you, my mother's brother; but he was poor, merely having his salary to live upon, so he could do nothing for me. I, also, was obliged to earn my own living, and I have done that ever since by working as a milliner. I do very well, and if I were not so young, I should be forewoman at Madame Divet's, who employs me at her shop on the Boulevard Magenta. I was returning from there when you met me this evening."

"It must be very unpleasant to have to return home alone every evening, and to incur the risk of being annoyed by fellows like the one who insulted you to-night," said André, interested in spite of himself by this simple tale.

"Oh, yes. The first time I was so frightened that I ran every step of the way; but I gradually became accustomed to it. Now, when any man attempts to enter into conversation with me, I send him about his business pretty tartly, I can tell you, and he seldom tries it a second time."

"But you must be exposed to many temptations, I'm afraid."

"Temptations! why, I have everything I want. My poor mother left me a little furniture, and as I receive very good wages, I have no difficulty about paying my rent. My quarters are not as spacious as those of Monsieur Marbeuf, but if you ever see them you will admit that they are very cozy, and even pretty. I see only a tiny bit of sky, it is true, but I have my flowers and birds all the same."

"That is something, of course, still—"

"Oh, I have many other diversions. Pleasant Sundays, for instance, when Madame Divet takes me with her to the Champs Elysées; besides, she occasionally takes me to the theatre. One of her oldest customers is an actress who often gives her tickets. I am very fond of the theatre. When a play pleases me, I buy it, and amuse myself by learning it by heart."

"And you feel no desire to go on the stage?"

"Oh, no! I am very happy as I am."

André positively envied the contented mind of this girl who accommodated herself so uncomplainingly to her cheerless lot, and who, although ruined like himself by her father's death, had never once thought of putting an end to her life. "She is more courageous than I am," he reflected. "It is true, though, that she hasn't stolen anything." And for the first time since their meeting in the street, he looked at her attentively. She was not beautiful, in the ordinary acceptation of the term. Her forehead was a trifle too low; her nose not of the Grecian type. Her lips were rather too full, and her chin too prominent. But what a complexion, and what eyes! What teeth, too! A pink and white complexion, lustrous brown eyes, sparkling with intelligence, and small, even, white teeth of dazzling brilliancy. And above this attractive face there was a mass of chestnut hair curling naturally.

"You know, sir, that wealth isn't happiness," the girl resumed, "and that one ought never to despair. I might have killed myself like many others, but I preferred to live; and I am succeeding wonderfully well. Is not my example worthy of being followed?"

"Yes," murmured the young man, "when a man is only hard up, suicide is cowardice."

"Then your troubles, I suppose, are troubles of the heart," said his neighbour, laughing. "Pshaw! they are not worth killing one's self for. I can speak only from hearsay, however, for I have had no experience in such matters; but I nursed one of my acquaintances who took laudanum because a young man abandoned her after promising to marry her. She did not die, however, and she solemnly promised me not to repeat the attempt, for she found that the scamp had long been playing her false with one of her friends."

"Do you think there are no other troubles but troubles of the heart?"

"Why shouldn't you tell me yours? Because you don't know me? That is true, you don't even know my name. I forgot to tell it you. It is Elizabeth Babois—not a very pretty name, is it? However, every one calls me Babiole, and I am so accustomed to this nickname, that now I almost think it is my real one. Well, sir, Mademoiselle Babiole begs you to confide your sorrows to her. It is very audacious on her part, perhaps; but she knows that it is a comfort to tell one's difficulties to a friend. If I were in trouble, I would tell you, and ask your advice before taking any desperate step."

"My mind is already made up," said André, gloomily.

"Then you admit that you are meditating self-destruction," exclaimed Babiole. "You certainly can have no mother, then?" André turned pale. His mother! He had forgotten her, for he had been on the point of blowing his brains out, without writing to her, or asking her forgiveness, for leaving her alone in the world. "If you still have a mother, you surely cannot think of killing yourself," continued Babiole.

"I have a mother, but not in Paris," was the reply, "She resides in the provinces."

"Then you are only temporarily in Paris?"

"I have come to stay," replied André, evasively.

"Will your mother come to live with you?"

"I think not."

"Ah, if I had a mother I could never make up my mind to leave her. But you, no doubt, have your reasons for residing at a distance from her—you have, perhaps, found a situation in Paris, and your mother prefers the country. I am like her. I should much prefer running about the fields to sitting cooped up in a work-room all day."

"That is only natural at your age."

"Oh, if I were thirty, it would be just the same. I like the open air and exercise. Shall you continue to share Monsieur Marbeuf's rooms? The apartment is rather small for two persons."

"Much too small," answered André, who was beginning to grow impatient.

Babiole perceived it, and resumed: "I beg your pardon, sir. I forget that you are in no mood to discuss such trifles. It is all the fault of my temperament. I cannot remain serious for any length of time. Madame Divet often scolds me for chattering thoughtlessly when I ought to weigh my words. However, you pretend that you are not thinking of suicide,

"I see very plainly that you have merely told me so to get rid of me. You won't succeed, however, unless you consent to let me take this revolver away with me."

"I cannot do that, mademoiselle. It does not belong to me."

"It belongs to Monsieur Marbeuf. I am aware of that. But I shan't keep it, for I haven't the slightest desire to use it. I will return it to its rightful owner to-morrow."

"Do you think I can find no other way of destroying myself, if I wish to do so?"

"No, and unfortunately, I shall not always be here to watch you; but our friend will soon return, and when he's here I shall feel less anxious. It is solitude that puts such horrible ideas into your head."

"I am expecting Louis, it is true," said André, "and it surprises me that he has not yet returned."

"Is that why you were watching the clock?"

"Yes, he promised me to be here before midnight."

"And because he is a few minutes late you want to shoot yourself! Did any one ever hear of such folly? In the first place, you are not familiar with his habits, as you arrived only this morning. I know them, though we are not even on speaking terms. He scarcely bows to me, in fact, when we meet on the stairs. But my window is directly opposite his, and I never see a light here before one o'clock in the morning. He spends all his evenings at some café."

"But he is not spending this one there, I am sure of that," muttered André, shaking his head despondently.

"Then you know where he is. Yet another reason why you shouldn't feel uneasy. He promised to return, and he hasn't been punctual; but even if he does stay out all night, you must admit that this isn't a sufficient reason for putting an end to your life. Confess that there is something else. Has Monsieur Marbeuf gone to do something upon which your future depends?" André could not repress a start of surprise. This child had in measure divined the truth, and he was astonished at her sagacity. "I see by your face that I have discovered the cause of your resolve," she continued. "You fancy that he dares not return, because he has failed. That is not a sensible conclusion, by any means. Don't you know the proverb: 'No news is good news?'" André shook his head sadly. "In any case, you would risk nothing by waiting. He will have to return, eventually; and it will be time enough for you to blow your brains out when you learn that you have nothing more to hope for. Recollect that you will, perhaps, hear what the matter about which you feel so anxious is satisfactorily arranged."

This argument made an impression upon André. At the age of twenty-five a man does not take leave of life without regret, after all.

"Ah! I have succeeded in convincing you, I see that," resumed Babiole. "You have a face that betrays your every thought. Now, it only remains for you to promise me that you will postpone the execution of your frightful project until to-morrow. When you have taken the required oath, I will go off and I won't return again until after daybreak."

"So be it. I give you my word of—"

"That isn't enough. Swear by your mother's life."

André had decided to wait until the morrow, and yet he hesitated to give an oath to that effect. He was annoyed, and even ashamed to allow himself to be thus influenced by Mademoiselle Babiole, a *grisette*, who had meddled in the most inexcusable manner with his affairs. The young

fellow had not yet cast off the prejudices of a provincial man of fashion. He classified women according to their toilets, and was greatly astonished to find that a poor girl of plebeian origin possessed both heart and intelligence. "I do not believe in taking oaths," he murmured.

"But I do in the present instance," retorted Babiole, "for I know that you would not dare to break it. If you refuse to do what I ask, I assure you that I shan't stir from here, and you won't try to turn me out by force, I hope."

"I swear, then," said André, his patience nearly exhausted.

"That is proper. My mind is easy now. Good-night, neighbour; must be at the shop at nine o'clock in the morning, so I will drop in to see you about eight. I hope I shall find you in a better mood, and that Monsieur Marbeuf will have returned with good news for you. I'm going now, and I leave the revolver with you. I trust you, you see."

As the girl spoke she rose up, offered André her hand, and then hastened from the room. André, left alone, soon relapsed into a state of cruel perplexity. He was obliged to admit that Babiole's advice was excellent, and that he had done well to follow it; but his situation had in no wise changed for the better. It was even growing worse every moment, for there were still no signs of Marbeuf. His absence seemed inexplicable. André racked his brain to devise a reason for it without finding a satisfactory one. The only chance was that M. Vernelle might not have been at home, and that Marbeuf was waiting for his return. But, then, even if he had dined out, or escorted his daughter to the theatre, he would have returned home by one o'clock in the morning. "Unless he has taken her to some great ball," thought the young man, unconsciously clinging to the last hope. "And yet people don't go to a ball before ten o'clock, and Marbeuf left me at half-past eight, and the Rue Bergère is not more than ten minutes' walk from the restaurant where we dined, so the banker would still have been at home. Louis is incapable of appropriating the money; he must have been killed and robbed, or else run over by a vehicle, and in either case the money hasn't been restored, so that I am lost. However, I will wait until eight o'clock, as I promised; then, or as soon as this worthy young girl, who has interested herself in my welfare, takes herself off, I will put an end to my life."

André spent the rest of this terrible night wandering about his friend's rooms, listening attentively to the sounds in the street without—sounds which gradually grew fainter and fainter, and soon ceased entirely. Each time the house-door opened to admit some belated inmate, he went out upon the landing to see if he could recognize Marbeuf's footfall, and each time he met with a fresh disappointment. After about six hours of suspense, dawn appeared—the dawn of a gloomy, cloudy, winter's day. Vehicles began rumbling briskly to and fro, doors open and shut, and house porters set to work, sweeping halls and stairs. The house where Marbeuf lived was an old one and there were plenty of draughts, so that a cold fog crept into the room, chilling André to the very marrow of his bones; nevertheless, his resolution remained unshaken. He now had barely time to write to his mother before Babiole arrived, and to pen a few words of farewell for Louis, in case the latter should return. Accordingly, André seated himself at the table where the revolver was still lying, and began a letter to Marbeuf, feeling that it would be the less difficult of the two to write. "My dear Louis," he began "I do not blame you. You tried to save me but could not. I gave myself a respite; it has just ex-

red. I have condemned myself, and I am about to carry the sentence to execution. I will not live dishonoured, I must die, since I have stolen eyes, stolen, whatever you may say to the contrary.

Engrossed in his writing, he saw and heard nothing that was passing around him, but suddenly a hand was laid on his shoulder, and springing up, he found himself face to face with a gentleman whom he did not at first recognise.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed.

The stranger, before replying, took possession of the revolver and the unfinished letter, put them both in his pocket, with wonderful assurance, and then sat down as coolly as if he were at home, and said: "I am tired. Your stairs are terribly steep, and I climbed them three at a time. It seems that I was only just in time."

André did not repeat his question, for a moment's scrutiny had enabled him to recognise the unexpected visitor, none other than M. Vernelle's valet.

"He has come to have me arrested," thought André, "and it is to prevent me from killing myself that he has taken possession of the revolver. But the window remains, and I won't be captured alive."

"I have had no end of trouble in discovering your abode," continued this singular visitor. "I have been looking for you for twelve hours or more, but it was only this morning that I obtained this address. You must suspect why I wished to see you, for this is not the first time we have met."

"I recollect having seen you yesterday in Monsieur Vernelle's private office."

"And somewhere else, as well. We were near neighbours at a restaurant where I occasionally take my meals. But you were not alone at the time, unfortunately, so I could not speak to you. I intended to follow you, in order to ascertain where you lived, and I waited for you in the Rue Lafayette. Your friend left you at the door of the restaurant, and I fully intended to take advantage of this opportunity to accost you, but just as you started off in one direction, and he in another, I was stopped by a block of vehicles, and lost sight of you. Still I was not discouraged. I knew your friend's name, as he has often been to our office for his employers who bank with us, and I felt sure that you had gone straight to his house on your arrival in Paris. So I went to his employers, Messrs. Pivot and Garnier, in the Rue du Sentier, to inquire his address, but I only found an errand-boy who could not give me the desired information. This morning, at six o'clock, however, I rang at M. Pivot's door, and he must have taken me for a madman, but he finally told me that his clerk, Marbeuf, lived in the Rue Lamartine. I took a cab; the doorkeeper down stairs told me that Marbeuf's rooms were on the fourth floor; the key was in the lock, so I opened the door softly, and here I am!"

André had listened in wonder to this strange explanation which certainly did not enlighten him. "It was well that I made haste," continued the valet. "Had I delayed even ten minutes longer, I should have been too late, I fear."

"I don't understand you," stammered André.

"Oh, you need not try to make me believe that it was only by chance that that revolver was on the table, and that you were writing a farewell letter to your mother." And, as André hung his head, in silent consternation, the visitor continued: "This contemplated suicide was a most senseless and absurd thing. Death repairs nothing, and when a man's guilty of

a fault he must repair it, especially when one hundred thousand francs are involved. That is a large amount, even to Monsieur Vernelle, and when a man has taken it, he must begin by making restitution. After that he has a right to blow his brains out, but not before. Oh, attempt no denial. saw you take the money."

"You saw me!" exclaimed André, wildly.

"Yes. There is a small sliding window between my office and my employer's private room, and this window was partially open at the time. When Monsieur Vernelle left you alone, I had curiosity enough to glance in and see what you were doing—"

"And you did not at once denounce me to your employer?"

"No, indeed; I am not obliged to give my reasons; still, I have objections to telling you that I feel a sincere compassion for you, not on account of this affair, but on account of my respect for the memory of your father whom I knew very well, indeed."

"You, sir?"

"Yes. I have been in Monsieur Vernelle's employ for many years, and am well aware of the service Monsieur Subigny rendered him in past time. Your father, in helping my employer, killed two birds with one stone, for he should have been thrown out of employment, and reduced to penury, had Monsieur Vernelle failed, as he certainly would have done but for your father's assistance." This unexpected announcement gave André a gleam of hope, though but a feeble gleam, for, by reason of Marbeuf's strange disappearance, he could no longer restore the money. "But, now I think of it, I have not yet told you my name," continued the cashier. "It is Chantepie, Jules Chantepie, and we may call ourselves compatriots, for Havre was your birthplace, and Rouen mine. There is necessarily sympathy between Normans, and I should always reproach myself if I ruined a promising young man's future, simply because he was guilty of a momentary weakness. I don't regret having acted as I have, as I have found you in the midst of preparations for self-destruction; for if you were not honest at heart, you would have crossed the Channel before now."

"I thank you for having judged me right. If you but knew! It was the merest accident that caused my ruin. I had not the slightest intention of keeping the bank-notes. I did very wrong to touch them. Monsieur Vernelle came in suddenly, and I had not time to replace the package on the table."

"So you involuntarily slipped it into your pocket. This is an explanation I should not recommend you to give to a magistrate, if questioned. But the matter will not go so far; it will remain between you and me. You have repented of the act, and that is enough for me. Still, that is not a sufficient reparation, and I am surprised that you haven't sent the money back."

"That was the first idea that occurred to me upon leaving Monsieur Vernelle's office."

"You did not carry it into execution, however."

"I beg your pardon. I lacked the courage to take the money back myself—I should have died of shame—but Marbeuf devised a way to save me. His plan was that he should go to Monsieur Vernelle and tell him that having found a package of bank-notes in the courtyard of the house, he had come to the conclusion that one of the clerks must have dropped them there."

"Not a bad scheme that, for you; but not equally good for me."

uld have cost me my situation. A banker does not keep a cashier who makes a mistake of one hundred thousand francs in counting eight hundred thousand. But when and where, if you please, was this restitution to be tried out?"

"Last night. I gave the money to Marbeuf while we were at dinner, and was to go straight to Monsieur Vernelle's on leaving me."

"He wouldn't have found him at home. Monsieur Vernelle had engaged a box for last evening, at the Renaissance, where a new play was to be performed for the first time, and he must have left home very early with his daughter."

"But he must have returned home after the performance."

"Of course; he is not in the habit of staying out all night. Your friend must have had to wait for him."

"Perhaps he did so; I don't know."

"You have not seen him since?"

"No, sir. I waited for him in vain all night, and as he has not returned, I can only think that some misfortune has befallen him. He has been robbed, or even murdered, perhaps."

"You believe that!" sneered M. Chantepie; "you certainly are an artist's fellow. You have proved it conclusively by intrusting such an amount to a penniless young man. Your Marbeuf probably took the first train for the north, and is in England or Belgium by this time. He has no reason to fear any extradition treaty, as he stole nothing from Monsieur Vernelle, and you will hardly enter a complaint against him."

"Marbeuf hasn't left the country. Marbeuf is an honest man. He has been my friend from childhood. He was my chum at college—"

"A great reason, that. Do you know what he has been doing since?"

"He has been acting as clerk in a business house."

"Where he does not bear a very enviable reputation. I have made inquiries concerning him, and find that he is only held in moderate esteem by his employers. It matters little, however, whether he has absconded or not, for no one will believe the story you have just related to me. You and your friends are responsible for Monsieur Vernelle's loss."

"I know it," replied André, "and it is for that very reason I wish to put an end to my life. Why do you interfere? What is your motive in coming here? To denounce me? Very well, go for a commissary of police if you like. He won't find me alive—but spare me useless reproaches, and believe me of your presence."

M. Chantepie was silent for a moment, and then he gently said: "Don't you understand that I have come to save you?"

"To save me? You!" exclaimed Subigny.

"Yes," replied Chantepie, quietly: "as I just told you, I am under obligations to your father, for if he had not come to my employer's assistance, the bank would have suspended payment, and I should have lost my situation. The service he indirectly rendered me is not one of recent date, it is true, but I have not forgotten it, and it is only natural that I should desire to pay my debt of gratitude. You thought, however, that I was sent by Monsieur Vernelle, and that I came to seize you by the collar and drag you to the nearest station-house. Not so; I don't confound a slight delinquency with a theft, or an honest man with a scoundrel."

"Then you think that I told you the truth, and that I had no intention of taking the money?"

"Yes. I witnessed the whole affair, as I told you once before, and I

noticed the movement of surprise which proved so unfortunate in its consequences. You showed a want of presence of mind, that is all."

"But Monsieur Vernelle can never be made to believe that, and he must have discovered that one hundred thousand francs were missing, he must know that I took the notes. I am none the less grateful to you for your kind intentions, however, and on the point of dying it will be some consolation to me to know that I have not lost your esteem."

"Don't talk any more about dying. You will live to be an old man, and I would gladly exchange my prospects for yours."

"I will not live dishonoured!"

"There you are again! How absurdly you talk! You are not in the least dishonoured. My employer thinks you a most deserving and honorable young man, for he hasn't the slightest suspicion that the money was ever in your pocket, or that it is even missing."

"Why, the money was to be drawn at six o'clock last night."

"Yes, by a man named Bertaud. Well, while you were in the office that gentleman called to say that he would not draw the money until the following day. It was to see him that Monsieur Vernelle left you at that moment, and it was arranged between them that the money should be kept all night in my safe. You had no sooner gone out than Monsieur Vernelle, after glancing hastily at his watch, called to me through the window, and handed me the packages of notes which I immediately locked up in the safe. The whole operation barely took a minute, as I overtook you on the staircase. It is true that I did not go through the form of counting the money, as I knew very well how much was missing and where it was."

"And instead of arresting me, you allowed me to go my way unmolested?"

"Yes, and I will now tell you why. In the first place, I had just learned that you were Monsieur Subligny's son, and nothing in the world could have induced me to denounce you, knowing that. Then, too, I relied myself upon being something of a physiognomist; and after seeing you, I was satisfied that you would return the money. I wanted to test you, and leave you free to act. I said to myself: 'night brings counsel;' besides, I intended to have a talk with you at the first opportunity. But unfortunately, I lost sight of you at the restaurant door, and I almost missed finding you again; but even if I hadn't succeeded, my mind was made up. I should have saved you even then."

"But how?"

"I should have paid Bertaud the eight hundred thousand francs this morning. The contents of the safe are not verified every day, and I felt sure that I should succeed in finding you, and that you would eventually restore the money. The idea of your committing suicide never occurred to me, nor did I foresee that you would think of such a thing confiding the money to an untrustworthy person."

"Marbeuf has not stolen the money. Marbeuf is dead or else he has been robbed."

"Which amounts to about the same thing, for the money is now irretrievably lost."

"And you will be compelled to divulge the fact."

"Never."

"But, if you are silent, sir, the loss will be discovered the first time the safe is examined, and you yourself will be accused of appropriating the money. I would rather die than allow an innocent man to be suspected."

"I don't doubt that in the least; but no one will be suspected. I have taken my precautions, and I shall make up the deficiency out of my own pocket."

"You, sir?"

"Yes, and to prove the truth of my words, I will show you that I have a package all ready," said the cashier, pulling half way out of his pocket a package of notes exactly like the one which André had abstracted.

"This is really too kind!" exclaimed the young fellow, moved to tears. "I will not allow you to make such a sacrifice for me."

"The sacrifice won't ruin me. It would be hard if I hadn't succeeded in laying by a little money during the twenty years I have been at work. I am not rich, but I am in comfortable circumstances. Besides, I have no intention of making you a present of the amount. You would refuse to accept such a gift, and my means wouldn't allow it. I only lend it to you."

"I shall never be able to repay the loan."

"Nonsense! you will repay it in less than a year." And noting André's air of astonishment, Chantepie added: "My dear fellow, you seem to be ignorant of your real value. Your physical and intellectual endowments constitute a very handsome capital. You will only have to learn to make good use of them, and that knowledge will be speedily acquired." André blushed. Marbeuf, only the evening before, had spoken similar words of encouragement, but these sounded strangely out of place in the mouth of M. Vernelle's cashier. "Oh, you need not take offence," continued Chantepie. "You won't have to resort to unscrupulous means to make your way in the world. You will only have to follow the promptings of your heart, for I suppose that Mademoiselle Clémence doesn't appear unattractive to you."

"Mademoiselle Vernelle is very charming, but I do not see—"

"You do not see that she loves you already. Well, I do. After your departure, she spoke of you in terms which I will not repeat for fear of offending your modesty. I know her, and I am sure of what I tell you. Vernelle, who only sees through his daughter's eyes, has a very high opinion of you, and when he knows you better, he will be even more kindly disposed towards you. For this reason, I predict that you will be my employer's partner and son-in-law by next year, consequently my employer, for I hope you won't dismiss me when you become the head of the house," concluded M. Chantepie, smiling.

"Should this dream ever be realised, I could not do enough to prove my gratitude," replied André, promptly.

"I am sure of that; so the service I render you is not as meritorious as seems to be. It will prove a very profitable investment for me."

"But a very risky one."

"On the contrary, a very safe one. I run no risk whatever, for I shall request you to give me a note for the amount I shall advance with interest at six per cent. per annum."

"On these conditions I might perhaps accept your offer, and yet—"

"You hesitate! What can I do to persuade you? I must extricate you from your embarrassing position; for if the truth should become known, I should be held responsible for the deficiency, and be compelled to make it good? Come, as we have no bill stamps here, sign me a receipt. Have you pen, ink and paper handy? Yes? Then sit down and write what I dictate."

André seated himself at the table, though not without some reluctance, while the cashier dictated. "I hereby certify that Monsieur Chantepie has

paid into the safe of Monsieur Vernelle, banker, in my stead the sum of one hundred thousand francs, due by me to said safe, and I hereby promise to refund him that amount five years after date."

"It seems to me that you can sign this without compromising yourself," added Chantepie, "and it is sufficient security for me."

André did not hesitate an instant, but signed the paper at once. "That is all right, now," said the cashier. "But it occurs to me that you ought not to give me this receipt until I have deposited the money, now in my pocket, in the safe."

If André had felt any doubts of his new friend's integrity, this warning would have instantly dispelled them. His only answer was to hand the receipt to M. Chantepie, who folded it and placed it in his pocket-book, saying as he did so: "You are now my debtor. Will you also be my friend? That is my most earnest desire."

As he spoke, he extended his hand. André took it and shook it cordially, but he was too much overcome with emotion to express his gratitude in words. A rap at the door interrupted the scene. On hearing the sound M. Chantepie's countenance changed, and he rose abruptly. One would have said that he was afraid of being found in conversation with his new friend. André was less surprised. He felt almost sure that the new comer was Babiole, for she had told him that she would return at eight o'clock. "Why didn't you tell me that you were expecting some one?" asked the cashier, rather testily. "Can this be Monsieur Marbeuf returning?"

"No, unfortunately," replied André. "Marbeuf would not have rapped. The key is outside the door, and he would have come straight in."

"Open it, then; but not a word on the subject we have just been discussing; and above all, don't mention my name."

André was spared the trouble of opening the door, however, for before he could reach it, Babiole entered the room, but paused, abashed, on perceiving a stranger. "Excuse me," she murmured, "I knew that you were not alone, for I heard some voices, but I fancied you were talking with your friend, Monsieur Marbeuf, so I ventured—"

"You did quite right, mademoiselle. This gentleman is also one of my friends, and his presence need not disturb you."

"Then Monsieur Marbeuf hasn't returned?" inquired the young girl, endeavouring to distinguish the features of this stranger who kept his face sedulously averted from her.

"No, mademoiselle, but I no longer feel any anxiety on his account."

"Really?" she asked. "How glad I am to hear it! This gentleman has probably brought you good news, then?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, very good news."

"Then I am truly grateful to the gentleman, for I felt very anxious. You did not go to bed, nor did I. I watched you pacing to and fro until morning. Then I couldn't wait any longer, so I dressed myself, and here I am! But I cannot remain; I must go to the shop at once; besides, I don't want to disturb you."

"Nor would I detain you, mademoiselle; but we shall see each other again."

"I hope so—and if you—"

Just then M. Chantepie, who seemed to be annoyed, rather than amused by this exchange of civilities, made an impatient gesture and his face turned towards the light. Babiole, on her side, did not complete her sentence, but

od with her lips parted and her eyes riveted upon the cashier, who stily turned his back upon her. André felt that M. Chantepie was sious for the visit to terminate; so taking the young girl's hand he led her tly towards the door, saying in a low voice: "Thanks! You saved . But for you, the good news would have come too late. This evening ill explain everything."

To his great astonishment, Babiole allowed herself to be led from the m without a word, she who usually chattered like a magpie. But as n as they reached the landing, she hastily turned to him and whispered: "eware of that man. He is a bad man." And without waiting for a ly from André, who was still holding the door partially open, she ran ftly down-stairs.

"Who is that girl?" inquired M. Chantepie, drily. "And how did you ome acquainted with her?"

"She is a milliner who has rooms on the same floor, and last night, when as on the point of blowing my brains out, she saw me with a revolver in hand, and came here to prevent me from shooting myself. Had she n a single moment later, you would not have found me alive this ning."

And in your gratitude you probably made certain disclosures to her."

None whatever, sir," replied André, a little annoyed by M. Chantepie's e and manner.

You can't make me believe that she did not ask you why you wanted ill yourself."

She did ask me; but I only gave her a very vague explanation. I ely told her I had troubles, without telling her what they were."

Even that was saying too much. I hope, however, that you have no f carrying the intimacy any further."

his time André's anger was really aroused, and he curtly said: "I am r debtor, sir, and I shall never forget it; but that is no reason why should treat me like a school-boy."

he cashier saw that he had gone too far, and with a sudden change of ner, he said: "You must not be offended with me. It was only my rest in you that prompted the warning. Recollect that this affair must ept a secret between us, if we are to avoid being compromised, and I en't much confidence in a woman's discretion. But I am alarming elf unnecessarily, for I am sure you will return to this apartment to take away your trunk. You will surely see but little of that girl. private secretary of one of the richest bankers in Paris can't live in gy house like this."

Monsieur Vernelle advised me to find some rooms, and I shall follow dvice. Still, if my friend Marbeuf should return, I shall continue to him."

What! you still entertain hopes of his return? You have too good an ion of him. Rest assured you will never see him again. It is useless s to tarry here any longer. You will come with me, won't you?"

Where?"

To our employer's, of course. He expects to see you at nine o'clock; can reach the Rue Bergère in ten minutes; but it is better to be ahead me than late. Monsieur Vernelle is a monomaniac on the subject of tuality, and he will be delighted to find you in his office."

André momentarily forgot Marbeuf's mysterious disappearance, and the lar warning Babiole had given him. He even forgot to write to his

mother and inform her of his good fortune. "But I can't go as I am," he muttered.

"Oh, I will give you time to wash your face and hands. As for your clothes, they are the same you had on yesterday, and they will do very well I think."

However, André made a rather less hasty toilet than that recommended by the cashier, who meanwhile strode restlessly up and down the room. He was evidently in a hurry to get away. "You are superb, my dear fellow," he exclaimed, when André was ready. "Mademoiselle Clémence will fall head over heels in love with you. I certainly made a mistake in the date of the marriage. I said in a year. You will be married in six months." André said nothing, though the remark greatly annoyed him. "Let us start," said the cashier, eagerly, turning towards the door. André locked it, and left the key with the doorkeeper in passing out. He still cherished a hope that Marbeuf would call for it; and on reaching the street, he paused to see if his friend was not in sight. Chantepie gave a slight shrug of the shoulders; and they walked down the Faubourg Montmartre without speaking. But at the corner of the Rue Bergère the cashier paused to say: "I think it would be as well to take some precautions. No one ought to know that I have been to your house. Vernelle thinks we have not seen you since last evening; and if any of the employés of the establishment see us together it might occasion remark. So I will go round by the Boulevard Poissonnière and the Rue Rougemont, while you follow straight on. I will take the clerk's staircase; you had better use our employer's. Try to appear at ease in his presence, and when he introduces you to me, you must pretend not to know me. Bye-bye, my dear friend." Then, as if with sudden recollection, he exclaimed: "Why, took Monsieur Marbeuf's revolver away with me."

"You can keep it. I have no further use for it," replied André with a smile.

III.

A MONTH has elapsed. André has entered upon his duties as private secretary, and discharges them in such a manner as to fully deserve the praise that M. Vernelle lavishes upon him. He now works ten hours a day. He has mastered the intricacies of the business. Accounts no longer have any secrets for him; he is equally at home with the business correspondence, for he is familiar with English, German, and Italian, and writes French much better than his employer. Being a capital penman, he would, if necessary, make an excellent book-keeper. He himself was greatly surprised to discover that he possessed these business talents; but they had simply remained in a dormant state, because he had never had occasion to make use of them. He possessed them, however; his father had been a merchant; it was in the blood. In character, also, André had greatly changed. The thoughtless and extravagant man of fashion had become a serious and industrious man of business, beginning work before the appointed hour, and dining frugally in order to save as much of his salary as possible. He has already returned his mother two hundred francs of the money she had advanced him for his travelling expenses, and he has so arranged his expenditure that he can send half of his salary to Madame Subigny every month.

It is true, however, that M. Vernelle paid all the expenses attending

upon his installation in his new quarters. A week after his arrival in Paris, he was able to settle down in a cheerful and prettily furnished suite of apartments in the Rue Rougemont, only a few steps from his employer's house; and on his arrival he found a receipt for the first quarter's rent and the upholsterer's receipted bill lying on the mantelshelf of his sitting-room. Moreover, as if to justify Monsieur Chantepie's predictions, M. Vernelle at once introduced André, not only to his chief employés, but also to the principal customers of the house, and to his business friends, very much as he would have presented a future partner. No one was very much surprised at the new-comer's good fortune. Some were rather jealous, perhaps, but all were compelled to do justice to his merits; besides, André had a way of making himself as popular with petty clerks as with great capitalists. He even succeeded in winning the goodwill of the formidable broker, Bertaud, though he never could speak to him without emotion, for the sight of this man recalled the most painful recollections of his life.

On the morning following the terrible night on which he had been so near death, everything passed off exactly as Chantepie had predicted. M. Vernelle received André with open arms. M. Bertaud called for his money, and took it away after carefully counting it. The deficiency having been made good by the cashier, the only trace that remained of the unfortunate hair was the remorse that lingered in André Subligny's heart. He had not forgotten his fault, though it seemed to him sometimes that it was all a dream; and his gratitude towards his benefactor was as profound as ever. They met very seldom except during office hours, for they lacked the same tastes, but they were on the best of terms; and whenever André attempted to refer to the services rendered, the cashier interrupted him by saying mildly: "Not another word or you will offend me. We will resume this conversation next year, when you become my employer."

Still there was one point that troubled André—the mysterious disappearance of Louis Marbeuf. No one had seen him since that eventful night, nor had anything been heard of him. At the end of a week the doorkeeper of the house where he resided informed the district commissary of police of his prolonged absence, and an inquiry was set on foot, but without result. André was questioned on the subject, but he took good care not to tell all he knew. In Paris, such mysterious disappearances are by no means rare; nocturnal attacks are still less so, but on the night which André had spent in waiting for his friend no murders had been reported, nor even any sudden death, nor any discovery of a lifeless body in the streets. André went to the Morgue, but he only saw there a few persons who had perished by drowning, and who did not in the least resemble his missing friend. Messrs. Pivot and Garnier were unable to give him the slightest information about their clerk, and did not conceal the fact that they intended to fill his place. Marbeuf, having no relatives in Paris, André was unable to push the investigation further, and he was unwillingly constrained to share the views of M. Chantepie, who persisted in the opinion that Marbeuf had crossed the frontier, as he did not fail to tell the young secretary from time to time, whenever opportunity offered. "Your Marbeuf has crossed the Atlantic and become a naturalized citizen of the United States by this time," the cashier would say. "He will discover a gold mine in California, perhaps, and repay you some day or other."

These jests annoyed André greatly, but he was unable to make any retort, for the conduct of the missing man really seemed unpardonable; and the young secretary finally came to the conclusion that Louis had allowed him-

self to be tempted by the large amount of money intrusted to him, and that he would never return. André had naturally gone to the Rue Lamartine for his trunk, M. Vernelle having advised him to take up his abode temporarily in some furnished rooms in the Rue Bergère, pending the preparation of the apartment in the Rue Rougemont; and on going to Marbeuf's, he had left a letter for him, in case he should return; however, he failed to see Babiole, who was not at home; and he did not meet her on a second occasion, when he called to inquire of the doorkeeper if Marbeuf had come back.

Still, he had not forgotten the young girl's warning respecting Chantepie. "Beware of that man; he is a scoundrel!" But then André was one of those persons who close their hearts against suspicion. When he liked a man, he liked him thoroughly; his gratitude to the cashier was boundless. He believed in him implicitly, and did not wish to be undeceived. Moreover, he attached very little importance to the girl's opinion, and firmly resolved to silence her if she ever ventured to speak disparagingly of the cashier in his presence, for he had by no means renounced the idea of seeing her again and having a talk with her.

Such was the state of affairs one month after the incidents previously recorded, and André was gradually recovering from the effect of the many shocks he had experienced, when one morning M. Vernelle, who had gone out in the morning, something very unusual on his part, sent his valet to summon his secretary to lunch. André eagerly obeyed the summons, for he knew that Mademoiselle Vernelle would be at the table, but just as he was leaving the room, he met Chantepie, who whispered: "Our employer has received bad news, and he isn't in a good spirit. I thought it best to warn you."

This confidential disclosure astonished André, who wondered what the tidings could be, for it had never occurred to him that the rich banker's peace of mind could be disturbed by any loss whatever, and a suspicion that M. Vernelle had in some way heard of the theft of the bank-notes flashed across his mind. "There has been a heavy failure at Marseilles," continued Chantepie, shrugging his shoulders, "and we shall probably lose a couple of million francs. Vernelle will never listen to me. I warned him that the firm was foolishly speculating with wheat, but he only laughed at me."

"How unfortunate!" exclaimed André, sincerely grieved.

"Oh, Vernelle could stand such a loss as this without feeling it, but he has been playing for a rise at the Bourse—still against my advice—and Rentes are now falling fast. There'll be a nasty business on settling day. Bertaud may go under—and I sha'n't regret his failure much—only the governor has been propping him up, and if he comes to grief, why, our firm will lose heavily."

"It is no wonder, then, that M. Vernelle should be depressed in spirits," remarked André.

"To say nothing of the fact that his health seems to be failing fast," quietly continued Chantepie. "His nervous attacks are becoming more and more frequent, and despite all the bromide he takes, he is very queer indeed at times. His physician told me so."

"Good heavens! you really terrify me!"

"The moral of all this, my dear fellow, is that you must make haste and marry Mademoiselle Clémence before her father's financial blunders reduce her to comparative poverty. So press your suit. I know that it is prospering finely. Rose, the young lady's maid, tells me her mistress talks of mar-

ne but you. Matters would progress even more rapidly, if you chose. I fear that you have been a little timid so far; but young girls do not like faint-hearted lovers. So come to the point, my boy, and mark my words, you will see the effect."

"The effect would be disastrous," answered Subligny quickly, "and I do not feel inclined to make the venture."

"So much the worse for you. You will end by being left out in the cold. If I advise you to go ahead, it is for your own sake, and a little for my own, for though I was delighted to be able to do you a service, I shouldn't care to lose my money. I know perfectly well that you have assured your life for my benefit, but I don't want you to die; besides, there is every probability that you will outlive me. Now excuse me for detaining you. I only wished to make you acquainted with the situation." Thereupon M. Chantepie re-entered his office, leaving the young secretary to his reflections.

The poor fellow was completely bewildered. M. Vernelle's misfortunes touched him as deeply as the cashier's language shocked him. The indifference and levity with which Chantepie announced coming misfortunes, and, above all, his advice respecting Clémence Vernelle, greatly surprised and irritated André; the more so as the speaker was his benefactor, and he had hitherto been greatly attached to him. "He seems to think that I have placed myself completely in his power," thought André. "I will let him see that he is mistaken. I owe him a debt of gratitude, it is true, but I am still master of my heart and my actions. I love Mademoiselle Clémence, but I certainly have a right to keep my love a secret, if I choose; and I shan't expose myself to the dangers of a refusal. Monsieur Chantepie may think what he likes about it—it makes no difference to me. He has just shown himself to me in a new light. I wonder if little Babiole was right, after all, when she advised me not to trust him?"

André now hastened into the room where the banker lunched every morning with his daughter and his secretary. The meals were usually delightful ones. The banker came in first, as a rule, bringing Subligny; then Clémence entered, fresh and cheerful, threw her arms round her father's neck and kissed and hugged him as she had done in the days when she still played with doll and hoop. The different dishes were all placed on the table beforehand, and each person helped himself. The presence of servants would have been a constraint, for this was the hour of familiar conversation. M. Vernelle really had no other time to himself during the day. He became young again, and laughed heartily at all Clémence's jests and puns. From the very outset he and his daughter had treated André as if he had been a member of the family, and the young fellow's behaviour had justified this cordiality. He had plenty of wit and tact, and, what is far better, sound common sense. He talked well, and he was a good listener. Attentive and grave, when the father happened to refer to some business matter which had been previously discussed in the office, he was never at a loss when the daughter engaged him in conversation upon theatricals, painting, or even dress.

That morning as he entered the room, late, for the first time, he perceived, at a glance, that the banker was greatly pre-occupied. His eyes were sunken, and his lips well-nigh colourless, while his drawn features indicated both mental and physical suffering. Clémence, on the contrary, had never been in more exuberant spirits. The rise and fall of stocks and financial panics did not affect her in the least. Her sky was always cloudless, and melancholy was a thing unknown to her. "You have come at

last, sir," she exclaimed, as soon as she caught sight of André. "It is very naughty of you to keep us waiting, especially to-day, for papa is terribly out of spirits, and I need your assistance in amusing him."

"You must excuse me, mademoiselle," stammered Sublingy. "Monsieur Chantepie detained me—"

"He was talking business, I'll warrant. He has no right to do so after the clock strikes twelve, and I am going to complain of him to papa, if he ever does it again."

"What are you talking about, child?" interposed M. Vernelle. "Take a seat, André. You mustn't be surprised if I am not in the best of humours this morning. I had one of my nervous attacks last night, and I am troubled with indigestion as well."

André saw that his employer did not wish that any allusion should be made to his business troubles, and he was about to inquire more particularly about his health, when Clémence prevented him from doing so by exclaiming: "And you said nothing to me about it, and I nearly forgot to give you your medicine. Fortunately, I have the bromide in my pocket. Quick, hand me your glass, so I can put the prescribed dose into it. Now do me the favour to take it before you begin lunch."

M. Vernelle swallowed, with a grimace, the bitter draught that his daughter had just prepared for him. "It is very unpalatable," he remarked, "and it seems to me that I have been growing worse ever since I began this treatment; I wrote to the doctor last night, and am expecting him here this morning. I want to consult him."

"He will tell you not to work so hard."

"It is impossible for me to do otherwise just now. Business matters require my closest attention, and they must have it—at whatever cost to myself," the banker added, gloomily. "But let us talk of something else. Have you heard from your mother, lately, my dear André? She is well, I hope."

"Perfectly well, sir. She is very happy, and it is to you that she owes her happiness. She blesses you every day."

"Why won't she come and pay us a visit?" inquired Clémence. "I am so anxious to know her."

"If you did know her, mademoiselle, I am sure you would love her almost as much as you must have loved your own mother."

This remark produced an effect that André had not foreseen. M. Vernelle turned pale, and dropped his knife and fork; Clémence blushed, hung her head, and gave her undivided attention to the very simple task of removing the shell of a boiled egg. André realised, when it was too late, that he had been guilty of a terrible blunder. It had never before occurred to him that M. Vernelle might not be a widower. Neither his father nor mother had ever spoken to him of Madame Vernelle, and yet they had often spoken of the banker, and had sometimes mentioned the daughter but of the wife—never a word.

When André handed his letter of recommendation to M. Vernelle, on his arrival in Paris, the banker had lost no time in introducing him to his daughter, but he had never said: "I will present you to my wife." During the past month, too, André had had abundant opportunity to satisfy himself that his employer was living alone with Clémence, and the thought of inquiring into the particulars of his marriage had never once occurred to our friend. M. Chantepie, who, undoubtedly, could have enlightened him, had never made any allusion to the subject. Why, then,

did the father seem agitated, and why did the daughter blush at the mere mention of a Madame Vernelle? Had the father never been married, or had Madame Vernelle conducted herself improperly, and the family been broken up in consequence of some scandal? At all events, André had certainly put his foot in it, as the saying is. With his eyes riveted upon his plate, he sat for some moments, pretending to eat; then, glancing up, he saw that Mademoiselle Vernelle was looking at him with a compassionate air, as one looks at a guest who has just broken a glass, or upset a decanter.

"My father has promised to take me to some watering-place this summer," she said at last, forcing a smile, "and he leaves the choice of the place to me. I have selected Havre, and I hope my father won't refuse you leave of absence at the same time. In that case, you can introduce me to Madame Subigny. At her age, a journey is very fatiguing, and we shall thus avoid giving her the trouble of coming to Paris."

M. Vernelle nodded his approval, but said nothing. He seemed to be suffering terribly. André stammered a few words of thanks, and the conversation again ceased. "I have certainly committed a terrible blunder," thought the poor fellow, "and Heaven only knows if Monsieur Vernelle will ever forgive me. I have certainly wounded him deeply, although quite unintentionally."

Clémence had not abandoned all hope of reviving the conversation, however, for she suddenly exclaimed: "How do you spend your evenings, Monsieur André? We seldom see you after the office closes. Do you often go to the theatre?"

"No, mademoiselle, I have not been there since I came to Paris."

"Then you must go with us some day. By the way, father has a box for the Opera Comique this very evening. Are you fond of music?"

"Very fond of it."

"Then you will enjoy hearing the 'Pré-aux-Clères;' I know it by heart, but I never tire of listening to it. You will accompany us, won't you?"

André glanced at M. Vernelle.

"I am not sure that I shall be able to take you there," said the banker. "I have an appalling amount of work on hand; besides, I don't feel well."

"All the more reason why you shouldn't remain at home," rejoined Clémence. "You have not gone out in the evening for a month; in fact, you haven't taken me to the play since the day you first introduced Monsieur Subigny to me, in your office. That evening, we went to the Renaissance. I remember it as if it were but yesterday, though I must confess that I scarcely heard a word of the play."

It would have been difficult to tell André more plainly that their first interview had made a profound impression upon her, and that the happy day was still fresh in her memory. He blushed with pleasure, and also with shame, for this allusion to the past reminded him of his fault, and of Louis Marbeuf, who had so mysteriously disappeared.

"But I shall listen religiously to the 'Pré-aux-Clères,'" continued Clémence, "and if you, father, go to sleep as you usually do, I shall still have some one to talk with, as Monsieur Subigny will be there. It is decided, is it not?"

"I can't promise," said the banker. "If I feel better, and my evening isn't taken up, as I fear it will be, by a very important matter, we will see."

"'We will see' is too vague. Insist with me, Monsieur André. My father won't refuse you; and you certainly richly deserve the pleasure of

hearing my favourite opera, for you have been hard at work ever since your arrival."

"I am at Monsieur Vernelle's orders," stammered Subligny.

"Clémence forgets that I release you at six o'clock every day," said the banker, smiling; "but she does quite right to offer you a seat in our box. When a man works as steadily as you do, a little diversion is a good thing, and I expect you lead a regular hermit's life. Recollect that this house is always open to you. It is not a very gay one, unfortunately, but you will always find a cordial welcome, a cup of tea, and a seat by the fireside. Not this evening, however, as Clémence seems determined to drag me to the theatre; but there is nothing, I hope, to prevent you from joining us there."

"He consents at last!" exclaimed the young girl, clapping her hands. "I trust that you are not going to refuse," she added, turning to André.

"I should be only too happy, mademoiselle, if—"

"If you refuse, I shall think you prefer your other friends to us."

"I have no other friends, mademoiselle."

"Indeed! Why, I was under the impression that you stopped with an old school friend when you first arrived in Paris?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, but I have not seen him recently. He has gone away—he has left Paris," replied André, in embarrassment.

"Ah! what has become of the young man?" inquired M. Vernelle. "He was a clerk in a mercantile house, was he not?"

"Yes, sir; but he has found a better position—abroad." André did not care to tell the truth in regard to Louis Marbeuf's disappearance, and with good reason. M. Chantepie, who was acquainted with the facts, had kept them secret, and André could hardly have told them to M. Vernelle without confessing his own fault.

"So, when your day's work is over, you are left alone?" remarked the banker.

"Yes, but I am not idle," said Subligny, quickly. "I have so many things to learn that I don't lack occupation."

"So you don't associate with any of my clerks?"

"I see Monsieur Chantepie occasionally."

"Then you certainly go to the cafés," replied M. Vernelle, laughing. "Chantepie is a model cashier, but when his accounts are adjusted, and his safe locked up, he only thinks of amusing himself, and spends his time in playing billiards and dominoes."

"I have accompanied him to the café a few times out of politeness, but we haven't the same tastes."

"I congratulate you on the fact, and advise you not to become too intimate with him; not that he is a bad fellow, by any means, but he was very indifferently brought up, and he is destined to remain in a subordinate position. You have a right to look higher."

"You are very kind, sir. Your good opinion is my only capital in life, however, and I am not ambitious."

"But you ought to be. I was no better off than you are when I began life, and you see that—"

At this moment the door opened, and a servant appeared to announce the arrival of the doctor. "Show him in," said M. Vernelle. And turning to André, who was rising to leave the room, he added: "You are not in the way. The doctor will decide whether I can safely go to the theatre this evening. You had better stay and hear what he says."

Dr. Valbrègue was still a young man, although he held the position

of chief physician at the Necker hospital. In addition to his incontestable talent, he had the good fortune to be endowed with a most prepossessing face, and a genial disposition. He smiled at Clémence, gave André a keen glance, and said to the banker, as he shook him by the hand: "Well, how does the bromide suit you? Are you feeling any better?"

"I must say that your compound is the most nauseous stuff imaginable, my dear doctor," M. Vernelle replied.

"Unfortunately we have not yet devised a way to cure nervous diseases with sweetened water," was the doctor's laughing reply. "The question is whether the medicine is doing you any good or not?"

"Not much, I am afraid."

"Indeed! how do you feel?"

"I am greatly troubled with dizziness. In fact, I am often obliged to cling to something to keep myself from falling while I am walking."

"That is the natural effect of the medicine. Is that all you have to complain of?"

"No; I often have painful spasms. I cannot sleep, and I have less and less appetite every day."

"That certainly is not due to the bromide. Where do you buy it?"

"At a chemist's my cashier recommended to me."

"What does your cashier meddle in the matter for? Please deal with Mialhe. He's the right man—the one safe chemist in Paris. Have you any of the preparation here?"

"Here is some, doctor," said Mademoiselle Vernelle, drawing a small packet of powder from her pocket.

"Very well, I will take it away with me and have it analysed at the hospital. Experience has made me distrustful in such matters."

"Do you suppose any one is trying to poison me?" asked the banker, laughing. "I warn you that you will get into trouble with my daughter if you do, for it is she who administers me the dose before each meal."

"I suppose nothing of the kind. I don't even accuse the chemist of carelessness, but I like to know something about the quality of the medicine I prescribe. The slightest error may be fatal in its consequences. Only a few weeks ago I lost a patient who had taken thirty milligrammes of strychnine, instead of the three milligrammes I had ordered. The chemist had made a mistake."

"You frighten me, doctor. I shan't dare to take anything after this. Drugs very seldom agree with me. Why, at this very moment, every muscle in my body seems to be twitching convulsively, and I feel as if some one were trying to strangle me. I experience the same feeling whenever I take the bromide."

"Well, take no more of it until I see you again, and in the meantime, work less. You must have rest and diversion."

"And go to the theatre often, eh, doctor?" interposed Clémence, quickly.

"Yes, on condition that he only sees bright and cheerful plays. To forget his cares and amuse himself, that's what your father needs."

"And that is just impossible," murmured the banker.

"But we think of going to hear the 'Pré-aux-Cleres' this evening," exclaimed Clémence.

"Indeed, well I cordially approve of this new remedy," rejoined the doctor. "It will be a pleasant change from this bromide which has such a singular effect upon you."

"Now, father, you no longer have any excuse for refusing."

"So I won't refuse. We will go to the Opéra Comique. André will accompany us, I hope?"

The young man bowed, colouring with pleasure, and as the doctor, who had never met him before, seemed to be looking at him attentively, M. Vernelle exclaimed: "Monsieur Subligny, my secretary."

André exchanged bows with M. Valbrègue, who gave his patient's daughter a keen glance. The clever physician had evidently fathomed the situation, and to judge from his manner, he did not disapprove of it. "Now, my dear financier, I must leave you," he said, rising. "I have an appointment to meet three fellow-physicians at the hospital at two o'clock. We are to hold a consultation over a very singular case—a man who has lost his memory entirely in consequence of a severe fall."

"That is very extraordinary, certainly," muttered M. Vernelle, abstractedly.

"Not so extraordinary as you suppose. Concussion of the brain often produces this effect, though I have never seen so complete an instance. Would you believe it, the person in question has not only entirely forgotten the accident that reduced him to this condition, but he has even forgotten his name. We have not yet been able to discover either who he is, or what happened to him. As his skull sustained no fracture, he recovered very rapidly from his injuries. He talks, and very sensibly, too, about matters and things in general, but he can recall nothing whatever of the past."

"Are you sure that he isn't deceiving you, doctor?"

"Perfectly sure. I have subjected him to various tests, and always with the same result. The idea that he, perhaps, had some reason for wishing to conceal his identity, occurred to me, as it did to you, so the police were informed of the facts, and the man was examined by several detectives. No one recognised him, however. Besides, he does not at all look like a criminal. He has an honest face, and he was very well dressed when he was picked up in an unconscious state."

"In the street?"

"Yes, and the strangest thing about it all is, that he did not meet with this fall on the spot where he was found. His wound must have bled very freely, and yet there was no blood on the pavement of the Boulevard des Invalides, where some labourers found him one morning as they were going to work."

"Then he may have been placed there after being nearly killed in some wine-shop brawl?"

"No; an examination of the wound satisfied me that he was not injured by a weapon, but that, in falling from a considerable height, his head came in violent contact with some hard body. I cannot swear to the facts, of course; but I am inclined to believe that after a more or less prolonged syncope he recovered sufficiently to get upon his feet and walk a short distance; then his strength failing him, he sunk fainting upon the sidewalk, where he must have spent nearly all night, for he was half frozen when he was brought to the hospital."

"That is very strange. But hadn't he any papers about him?"

"Not a letter, not even a visiting card; nothing but sixty francs in his pocket, which proves that he wasn't attacked by thieves. They would have searched and robbed him."

"But what are you going to do with the poor fellow?"

"I think of sending him to the Saint Anne Asylum, where he will be received as a lunatic, although he isn't one. But I haven't lost all hopes of

curing him, and I shall keep him as long as I can, for his case is worthy of careful study. Besides, the police are naturally inquisitive, and although they have ceased to investigate the affair, they would not be sorry, I think, to be enlightened respecting the identity of this unknown patient. When he becomes an inmate of the asylum no one will see him; but at the hospital visitors are admitted twice a week—Thursday and Sunday—and there will perhaps be some one who can tell us the name of the man we call Number Nineteen. But I must be off now. I will call to see you again on the day after to-morrow, my dear Monsieur Vernelle, and in the meantime, remember my prescription: rest, and plenty of amusement. Mademoiselle, I leave it to you to see that my instructions are carried out."

Having said this, the doctor took leave of them all with a pleasant bow, and M. Vernelle, who had risen to accompany him to the door, returned, shaking his head. "Rest, and plenty of amusement," he said. "One can't purchase these remedies at a chemist's, unfortunately."

"No, but one can find them elsewhere," replied Clémence, gently; "and we will see that you have them this evening; will we not, Monsieur André?"

"I should be only too happy if I were able, and if your father would allow me, to contribute to his amusement," stammered Subligny.

"Then it is settled," said the banker. "You must join us, André, at the theatre this evening. Clémence will tell you the number of our box. I don't invite you to dine with us, because you will be detained at the office a little later than usual to-day, if you attend to the matters I spoke to you about, and you will hardly have time to dress. Besides, I have to go out now, and I don't exactly know when I shall get back."

André returned to the office, greatly preoccupied by what he had just seen and heard. During this repast, which had lasted but three quarters of an hour, he had learned more about the Vernelles than during the whole of the preceding month. In the first place, he had unwittingly satisfied himself of the existence of a skeleton in the household. The father and daughter evidently had some secret which they were concealing from the world. The emotion they had been unable to hide when André referred to Madame Vernelle, proved this conclusively. Dr. Vallbrègue's remarks had been equally surprising. He had admitted the possibility of poisoning by the substitution of one drug for another, and had spoken with strange indifference of a mistake which had recently cost a patient his life. The precaution he had taken in carrying off the bromide to be analysed, plainly indicated the suspicion which had occurred to him, but which André considered too absurd for belief. While thus reflecting, the young secretary sat down at his table, and when he began his work he gradually forgot the incidents which had occurred during lunch, or rather the only one that he remembered was the invitation to the theatre and Clémence's encouraging glances. She had almost made advances to him, and her father, who had certainly perceived it, did not disapprove, as he had offered Subligny a seat in his box. And yet, André's joy was not unalloyed. He would have preferred a less rapid progress towards the goal. It seemed to him that the father and daughter did not know him well enough to give him so much encouragement. He, of course, could not suspect them of being actuated by mercenary motives, but he felt that there must be some reason for the marked preference they showed him. Instead of flattering himself that he owed it solely to his personal appearance and attainments, he concluded that there must be some stain on the family honour, and that he was indebted to this stain for having been chosen in spite of, or rather on account

of, his poverty, as it was supposed that he would be less exacting. These suppositions were by no means agreeable; nevertheless, André realised that his heart was given beyond any possibility of recall to his employer's charming daughter. So he continued to dream of the joys that the coming evening had in store for him, and he made more than one mistake in the writing he had to do. And yet, no one was there to disturb him, for M. Vernelle had gone out immediately after lunch, and had announced that he would not return until late. This absence was highly significant. Nothing save matters of the greatest importance could have induced the banker to abandon the superintendence of his business, even momentarily; hence, it seemed probable that he was making some desperate effort to maintain his credit, or negotiating a loan to repair the breach made in his capital by a defaulting debtor and some unfortunate speculations.

André could do nothing, but he said to himself that his fortune seemed to have fallen upon this formerly prosperous house almost simultaneously with his arrival; and he wondered if he might not have what is familiarly known as the evil eye. These reflections, and others of a similar character, somewhat marred his anticipations of a pleasant evening with Mademoiselle Vernelle, who did not seem to have the slightest suspicion of her father's financial embarrassment. Immediately after breakfast, she had sent André the number of the box, with a message to the effect that she would certainly expect to see him. It was evident that she looked forward with great pleasure to listening to her favourite opera in his company. André, in spite of his anxiety, resolved to keep the appointment, and made all possible haste to finish his correspondence in order to return home, dress, and dine so as not to keep her waiting.

He finally completed the last letter he had to write, and he was about to place the whole correspondence upon M. Vernelle's desk, so that it might be signed before his employer's departure to the theatre, when he heard the bell of the telephone ring. The banker often made use of this ingenious invention in communicating with his principal customers, and it was usually André who applied his ear to the tube, and transmitted the questions to M. Vernelle, who gave his answers without rising from his chair. In the present instance André thought it his duty to act exactly as if M. Vernelle were there, and then, if the question proved puzzling, to reply that his employer was absent. He therefore approached the instrument, inquired who the speaker was, and waited. "It is Jean Bertaud," replied the telephone. "Are you there? There is something fresh."

The name of Bertaud made André start. It was that of the owner of the famous eight hundred thousand francs—the speculator whose speedy ruin had been predicted by M. Chantepie, and with whom M. Vernelle had entered into a sort of partnership in stock speculations. André had often met this bold speculator, and was, indeed, quite a favourite with him, though he had never made any attempt to win his good opinion, for he thoroughly disliked him. Bertaud had all the failings common to *parvenus*. He was arrogant, ill-bred and vain. He boasted of his wealth on all occasions, and snubbed every one who was poor; and yet, he honoured Subligre with friendly hand-shakes which the latter would certainly have dispensed with had he been in a situation to do so. However, André was well aware that Bertaud's interests were closely connected with those of his employer, and he felt sure that the coming communication had reference to the crisis which threatened both the broker and the banker.

"There is something fresh," Bertaud had said, through the telephone.

and this was evidently the preface to news from the Bourse—perhaps good, perhaps bad, but important, in either case. Had a secretary a right to receive it in his employer's stead? André thought not, and so he hastily replied: "Monsieur Vernelle has gone out, and did not say when he would return."

Then he listened, expecting to hear something like: "Tell him that I will come to see him at such an hour," or, "Who are you? Are you authorised to take his place?" But, to his intense surprise, the response was: "So much the better. We can talk freely. I am glad to tell you that we are both safe. I have hedged all right." And, as André remained silent, the telephone continued: "Come and take supper at the Helder at midnight. I will explain the trick to you, and we will laugh over it together. There will be some ladies there. The guilty mother has unearthed a girl fit for a king. Come and see her."

This was going altogether too far. Such a communication could not be addressed to Monsieur Vernelle, a grave and irreproachable family man. André dropped the tube that had brought him this strange message. He did not wish to hear any more, still less to be obliged to reply to it, and he was about to resume his seat, when the sudden opening of the little window that connected the cashier's office with the banker's, made him turn his head. "Whom are you talking to, my dear fellow?" inquired M. Chanteple, with his elbow on the sill.

"With Monsieur Bertaud," replied André; "but I can't make any sense of what he is saying. I began by informing him that Monsieur Vernelle was not here, and he replied by telling me something about a trick he has played upon some one, and about a supper."

"Oh, there must be some mistake. That communication was not addressed to the governor, of course. Some one has made a mistake with the tubes. I'll set the matter right. Don't answer."

André knew that there was a second telephone tube in the cashier's office, so it was not difficult for him to explain the mistake. Bertaud had fancied he was talking to Chanteple, and the latter, warned a little too late, now hastily engaged in conversation, through his own tube. But about two minutes afterwards he returned to the window, and said with a slightly embarrassed air: "Bertaud is certainly losing his senses. He is engaged in speculations which may ruin him, and yet he only thinks of gadding about. It was me he was inviting to go on a lark with him to-night, but pray believe that I have sent him about his business."

"I didn't know that you were so intimate with him," remarked Subigny.

"Oh, intimate isn't the word. Bertaud lives well. He denies himself nothing and occasionally gives very fine dinners, to which he invites me. I accept because I am fond of good cookery, but that doesn't prevent me from keeping him at a distance, and if he comes to grief, why, so much the worse for him."

"It doesn't seem likely that he will. He just remarked through the telephone that he had hedged, and that you had nothing to fear."

"Oh, I understand. I asked him about a week ago to buy me a few Northern Railway shares—a little speculation quite within my means, and as the stock has fallen since then, he meant to say that he has made the matter all right by one of his many devices."

"But he doesn't seem to have covered M. Vernelle."

"Who knows? He's very cunning, and if any one can help the governor out of his difficulty it's certain'y Bertaud. He's serious when it's necessary

and knows the Bourse better than most other speculators. He has no doubt operated for Vernelle all right, and I shall be delighted to see the governor out of this mess. But hullo, it's five o'clock," added Chantepie, turning to glance at the clock in his office. "I am going to shut up shop now, and I advise you to do the same. Monsieur Vernelle won't be back until dinner-time. Come and take a glass of absinthe with me at the Café Frontin."

"Thanks, but I never drink absinthe. Besides, I have some matters at home to attend to."

"Then we will give it up, and I will accompany you as far as your door. It is on my way, you know,"

André felt a strong inclination to refuse, for M. Chantepie's society was becoming more and more distasteful to him; but he remembered that the cashier must know what had become of Madame Vernelle, and this was a good opportunity to question him in an indirect way, and without appearing to attach any importance to the matter. "All right," he replied, after a moment's reflection. "I am going down now. Meet me in the courtyard."

Chantepie closed his window. Subligny gathered up the letters, placed them on the banker's desk, took his hat, and left the room.

The cashier was awaiting him at the foot of the stairs, and slipping his arm through Subligny's he gaily asked, "Well, how did the lunch pass off, and how is your affair with Mademoiselle Clémence progressing?"

"What affair?" asked Subligny, coldly.

"Your love-affair, of course. The father was present, I know, but he can't see beyond the end of his nose, and you might easily have scored a point or two; unfortunately, however, I see by your face that you have not yet relinquished playing the part of a silent lover."

"I never told you that I was in love."

"True, but I guessed that you were; and I repeat that your success depends entirely upon yourself. By the way, Vernelle and his daughter are going to the Opéra Comique this evening. If I were in your place, I would drop in there, and then go and pay your respects to our employer, who could hardly fail to offer you a seat in his box. In that case, make the most of your opportunity, and, above all, don't fail, at the first chance you have of being alone with the girl, to obtain from her a promise to marry you. The father will perhaps growl a little when his daughter confesses that she has engaged herself without his permission, but I know him—he will give his consent eventually."

André might have replied that he had already received an invitation to join the father and daughter at the theatre; but he was unwilling to confide his good fortune to a man whose intentions he could not consider above suspicion. He even felt that the moment had come to put an end to these troublesome importunities. "Excuse me," he said, impatiently, "but I should really like to know why you insist so much on this subject. I haven't forgotten that I am under obligations to you, but though it is my warmest desire to repay the money you advanced to me, I am not disposed to submit to unreasonable exaction on your part. I would rather confess my fault to Monsieur Vernelle than relinquish my right to manage my own affairs according to my liking."

The shot told, and M. Chantepie changed his tone. "You do wrong to take offence, my dear fellow," he said, with an air of contrition. "I never once thought of trying to exert any authority over you, and Heaven forbid

that I should taunt you with the service I rendered you. You are at perfect liberty to marry or not, as you please, of course; only where there is a will, there is a way, and if you are so anxious to free yourself from your debt to me—”

“I am very anxious to do so, of course; but if Monsieur Vernelle is on the brink of ruin, as you pretend, it isn't by marrying his daughter that I shall be able to accomplish the matter.”

“He is in danger, but he may escape ruin, for all that. I even hope that Bertaud will save him; and in any case, Mademoiselle Vernelle will have the fortune of her mother, who married under the separate property system.”

“Her mother!” exclaimed Subigny, remembering the scene at the lunch-table.

“Yes; she had six hundred thousand francs, which were of great assistance to Vernelle in starting his banking-house; and unless she has spent them—”

“She is dead, isn't she?”

“Oh, no, indeed. On the contrary, I imagine she is in excellent health!”

“What! isn't Monsieur Vernelle a widower?”

“No, unfortunately for him. But ten years ago his wife left him. She ran away one fine morning with a gentleman—who was not her first lover, by any means—and nothing has been heard of her since her flight. Some persons suppose that she is in America. I thought you were aware of all this, for your father knew it, and I am surprised that he never spoke to you about our employer's domestic troubles.”

“He never did.”

“That explains your ignorance, then. He probably had his reasons for being silent. But you seem to be overcome with consternation. How absurd! Mademoiselle Clémence isn't to blame for her mother's delinquencies. I would willingly vouch for her virtue, and you can marry her in all confidence, if your heart prompts you to do so. But here you are at your door, and as you don't like abstinence, I will leave you. Don't forget my advice. Strike while the iron is hot, and good luck to you!”

IV.

MARCH had scarcely begun, and yet the weather was delightful—it was one of those warm spring evenings so often followed by a chilly morrow, but which draw even the most quiet Parisians out of doors. The boulevards were crowded; and there was a great competition for seats in front of the cafés. André, taking advantage of the pleasant weather, walked to the theatre, where he was to meet M. Vernelle and his daughter. He had dined alone at a little restaurant on the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle, and, though he had dressed beforehand, it was still early, so he was not obliged to hurry. The performance of the “*Pré-aux-Cleres*” would not begin until nine o'clock, and he did not care to be the first to reach the box in which he now almost regretted having accepted a seat. Indeed, never had he felt less inclined to enjoy listening to good music.

M. Chantepie's revelations had filled him with consternation. Nothing could be more distasteful to him than the idea of falling in with the views of this man who urged him to marry with such strange persistence, and who seemed, at the same time, to take pleasure in showing him the skeletons in the Vernelles' cupboard; the disgrace that had clouded the past,

and the probability of future ruin. André now understood why Clemence had hung her head, when he had spoken of her mother; and he wondered more and more why he had never before heard a word respecting this unfortunate affair. His parents could not have been ignorant of it. Why had they neglected to mention it to him, if only to prevent him from committing a painful blunder, like that of the morning? They might have foreseen what would happen. It was also necessary for him to look the situation, as described to him by the cashier, calmly in the face.

What was Chantepie's object in urging him to marry the banker's daughter? Was it really because he hoped, in this way, to secure the speedy payment of the money advanced to André? Subligny was beginning to doubt it, and to wonder if Chantepie were not secretly conspiring against his employer, and if M. Bertaud were not in league with him. This broker, who sent such singular messages through the telephone, did not seem to be very anxious to extricate his partner, Vernelle, from his embarrassment. On the contrary, he merely seemed to think of saving himself; and judging from what he said, he had succeeded. Hence one might well suppose that Chantepie was conspiring with him, and that the pair of them were betraying the banker to whom they both owed so much. Should he, André, denounce them? He thought of doing so, but he could furnish no convincing proofs of his suspicions; besides, he could not forget that Chantepie had saved him by lending him a hundred thousand francs to replace the money which had disappeared with Marbeuf. He could not repay this kindness with ingratitude, and yet he was resolved not to submit to Chantepie's domineering authority. There was but one way to escape from it, however, and that was to tell M. Vernelle everything, and leave his fate in his hands. But if he did this, he would be obliged to renounce Clémence. M. Vernelle might forgive his misdemeanour, but he would no longer be disposed to give him his daughter in marriage. And what a moment this would be to retire from the field! Just as ruin seemed about to overtake M. Vernelle, and the former millionaire's only child was in danger of finding herself without a dowry, and without a future—for her mother's conduct must be known, and no doubt it was of a kind to keep most suitors at a distance. "It would be cowardly," André said to himself, as he walked thoughtfully along the Boulevard des Italiens. "For the present I will display a prudent reserve in my intercourse with the father and daughter. I will also keep a sharp watch on Monsieur Chantepie, and if he ventures to give me advice which sounds too much like an order, I will tell him very plainly that I must be allowed to manage my own affairs. Should he declare war against me, I shall try to find some weapon that will enable me to hold my own. I will question that girl who told me to beware of him. She knows his past, and she will tell me what he has done. Poor Babiole! I have deferred thanking her too long. I really owe my life to her. If she hadn't come in just as I picked up Marbeuf's revolver, I should have been buried a month ago. To-morrow is Sunday; I shall be at liberty, and I will take advantage of the opportunity to go and see her. She won't be at work, and I hope I shall find her at home. She told me, I know, that her employer sometimes took her to the Champs Elysées; but I will call very early."

Absorbed in these reflections, André reached the Opéra Comique. The performance had begun at eight o'clock with a one-act piece preceding the "Pré-aux-Clercs." The first intermission was now taking place, and a crowd of people who had come out of the theatre were lounging about smoking and

chatting. André paused for a moment, near a newspaper-kiosk, to wait until the crush was over. He did not think it probable that M. Vernelle had yet arrived, and he hoped to recognize the banker's carriage as it passed. While watching for it, he suddenly caught sight of a man whom he fancied he recognized. This person, who was of medium height, but very stout, carried an enormous bouquet which he seemed to be trying to hide under his overcoat, which was unbuttoned. A sudden change in his attitude at last showed André the coarse red face of Bertaud, the speculator. "What can he be waiting for?" the young secretary said to himself, stepping back behind the kiosk. "Probably for the creatures he invited to supper. It isn't time yet; but perhaps he sent them to the theatre while he attended to some business. Possibly he has learned through his friend, Chantepie, that Monsieur Vernelle will be at the theatre this evening, and he doesn't care to meet him. In either case, I did as well not to tell Chantepie that I was coming, and I would rather that Bertaud did not see me."

Having come to this conclusion, André turned up the collar of his overcoat, pulled his hat down over his eyes and waited. A few seconds after he saw a cab draw up near by, whereupon Bertaud darted forward to open the door, and began to assist a partly female of mature age in alighting. She almost fell into his arms, but it was not for her that the bouquet was intended, for he lost no time in getting rid of her, and again turned to the vehicle which contained a second person. This one, however, seemed to be in no hurry to alight, and, indeed, the stout woman was obliged to resort to earnest entreaties to induce her to do so. She finally stepped out; and while Bertaud was paying the driver, she took the arm of the matron who accompanied her. It was with the utmost difficulty that André repressed a cry of surprise. He had recognized Babiole, the girl to whom he was indebted for a service which he could never forget. All his illusions respecting her were abruptly dispelled. He had really supposed her to be a modest and industrious girl, but what could he think of her now?—there she stood in the society of a scamp like Bertaud, and of a woman of questionable appearance. However, when Bertaud offered her the bouquet, she refused it as André saw, and thereupon it was accepted with a great deal of fuss by the buxom matron. André concluded from this that Babiole did not care for the broker's attentions, and that she had not expected to meet him, and this reflection made the young fellow's mind easier. The fat woman was no doubt Babiole's employer. Indeed, she looked just the kind of person to keep a second-class millinery establishment. Babiole's sulky manner now showed plainly enough that Bertaud's company was anything but agreeable to her, and finally the old scoundrel concluded to beat a retreat: not, however, without having held a private conversation with the elder woman. It was short, and evidently satisfactory, for the broker walked away with a complacent air. Babiole and the woman who acted as her chaperone then entered the theatre, and André, who had thus far escaped observation, took good care not to show himself.

This unexpected meeting had changed the whole current of his thoughts. He had not forgotten Mademoiselle Vernelle, but he could not help thinking of this mere child who had saved his life, and who was now evidently in great danger, exposed as she was to the machinations of Bertaud and the female who accompanied her. "I can't allow this!" muttered André, stamping his foot angrily. "I once delivered her from the persecution of a passer-by, and she repaid me an hundred-fold! I will watch over her during the performance, and when it is over, I will be at hand to see her safely home."

An instant's reflection moderated his ardour. He recollected that it would be impossible for him to leave M. Vernelle's box during the performance, and that he must afterwards escort his friends to their carriage besides, Mademoiselle Vernelle had good eyes, and she would not fail to notice him if he spoke with a young and pretty girl. And he was more than ever anxious not to offend Clémence, for this evening would perhaps decide his destiny. How was he to reconcile his hopes as regards Mademoiselle Vernelle with his resolve to defend Babiole? He finally decided that the best thing to do was to give no sign of his presence at the theatre, but to be on hand at the critical moment. He knew that Bertaud intended to sup at the Café du Helder; consequently, he need only mount guard at the door of the restaurant to prevent the girl from entering it.

André did not even ask himself if she would accept him as an escort, or what would be the consequences of his interference. Having thus made up his mind, he gave the number of M. Vernelle's box to an attendant, and as he ascended the stairs of the theatre he had the mortification of finding that the first act of the "Pré-aux-Cleres" had just begun. A lover should never be late. André had made a bad beginning. He was obliged to summon all his courage before he ventured to enter the box, for he feared he would be ungraciously received; but a pleasant surprise awaited him. Two hands were cordially extended to him; and the father waved him to a seat beside the daughter, who, in her turn, smilingly motioned him to remain silent, for she was unwilling to lose a single note of Herold's delightful music. André noticed with a sensation of profound relief that M. Vernelle looked more cheerful than in the morning, and he felt satisfied that the business matters which had troubled the banker were now satisfactorily adjusted. Bertaud had probably saved himself by some clever manoeuvre, and his partner had profited by his shrewdness. Thus the broken might be a libertine, but not a traitor; and André began to feel more amicably disposed towards him, although still determined to defend Babiole from his machinations.

But Babiole was soon almost forgotten in the happiness he experienced at finding himself near Clémence. When she leaned forward, her hand grazed André's, and she found his eyes riveted upon her face whenever she turned her head to see what he thought of the air that had just been sung. And M. Vernelle evidently approved of all this, for he smiled pleasantly, and his face wore a softened expression that his secretary had never seen upon it before. Besides, was not the seat he had assigned to André sufficient proof of his cordial approval? His acquaintances certainly thought so. To show them his daughter seated beside André, in this public place, was, in their opinion, at least, quite equivalent to an announcement that the young man would soon become his son-in-law. The act seemed very short to Subigny, though he scarcely heard a note of the music. In fact, he did not even see the singers. He only had eyes for his pretty neighbour; and it was merely by chance that, just as the curtain fell, he glanced down at the dress circle and perceived Babiole looking up at him.

He coloured and drew back, but Babiole had recognised him, for she, on her side, blushed. All this escaped Mademoiselle Vernelle's notice, however. "What adorable music!" she exclaimed. "Do you admire it as much as I do? I was never so happy, and I should like every one around me to share my happiness."

André was about to assure her that he was in the seventh heaven of delight, but the banker checked him by saying, gaily: "It is I, who am the

happiest of all. In the first place, because you both are happy, and secondly, because I feel so much better this evening. The improvement perhaps, is due to the fact that I took no bromide before dinner. But the best news I have reserved for the last. My credit is saved. My house has just successfully weathered the worst storm it has ever encountered."

"What! father, you are talking business here!" interrupted Clémence. "If that is the effect the 'Pré-aux-Cleres' has upon you—"

"That is just like a girl! You can't realize that I have been on the verge of ruin. Only this morning I had no expectation of avoiding it. That was the reason I was so depressed in spirits. Finally an inspiration occurred to me. The fall of stock was ruining me, but I sent Bertaud word to sell twice as much as I had purchased during the last month. I risked my all, and was so anxious that I lacked the courage to go to the Bourse. Stock will be still lower to-morrow, but now I shall not only lose nothing, but make a million and a half. Your dowry, my dear child," he added, with a furtive glance at André, who scarcely knew whether to feel glad or sorry.

"Then you have doubtless seen Monsieur Bertaud?" he said, timidly.

"No, though I am rather surprised that he did not call on me after the Bourse closed. He has been too busy, however, even to send me a memorandum of the day's operations. But I know him too well to feel the slightest anxiety. Besides, he, himself, must have been exceedingly anxious, for he had as much at stake as I had."

"He announced the great victory to Monsieur Chantepie by telephone."

"There, I was sure of it. Chantepie ought to have informed me of it, however."

"But you hadn't returned when he left the office, sir."

"That's true. I was defeated by the Marseilles failure. In that direction, unfortunately, we can't expect anything. Not even 15 per cent. But my good luck of to-day compensates me, and when I'm happy, I desire every one round me to be happy. What can I do for you, André?"

"For me? why, you have loaded me with benefits, sir, already. I desire nothing."

"Is that really true?" inquired M. Vernelle, rather mischievously.

"Well, I only desire one thing, that I may never leave you, and that you may always be equally fortunate in your business operations."

Clémence was nervously toying with her fan; and André asked himself what this conversation would lead to. B bled in the dress circle was looking up at him, but for the moment he had no thought of her. "I also hope that you will never leave me," said the banker, gently; "but you cannot always hold the position of secretary. It does very well now, while you are young; but by-and-bye you must have something better. Besides, you forget your mother. I am sure she can't be reconciled to the idea of always being apart from you."

"My mother could easily be persuaded to come and reside in Paris."

"Yes, if you had a permanent position—an assured future. If you were married, for instance, well married."

"That is a dream which I fear will never be realized."

"But why, my dear fellow? Is it because you are too hard to please?"

"Possibly," faltered Subigny, with a furtive glance at Clémence.

"That is a pity, but on the other hand, it is better than being too modest. Ambition is an excellent thing in a young man; and it is certainly no dis-

advantage to have an ideal. I have some curiosity to know yours. You would naturally wish to love your wife, and to be loved by her in return; but you would perhaps require something more; wealth, for instance?"

"No, sir, not at all. I would much rather marry a young girl without a dowry, provided she had courage enough to link her fate with mine. I would work unremittingly to make her rich, and I am sure that I should succeed."

"These sentiments do you honour. But what if you should happen fall in love with an heiress?"

"That would be very unfortunate, for I fear she would suspect me mercenary motives."

"But what should you do in such a case?"

"I think that I should wait until my fortune was equal to hers, before declaring my affection—and as I have nothing—"

"You might as well say that you would pray for her to lose all her money," M. Vernelle interrupted, laughing. "You are hard upon the daughters of millionaires. If your ideas on the subject of marriage became general, well-dowered young ladies would be reduced to marrying fortune-hunters. It isn't their fault, however, if their parents have so much money, and it seems very unjust to make them bear the penalty of their birth. Ask Clémence what she thinks of your theories."

"I think they are very wrong," replied Mademoiselle Vernelle, unhesitatingly. "If we are to believe Monsieur Subligny, one has perfect control over one's heart. But does one ever know whom one will love? And when one loves, does one trouble one's self about secondary considerations? If I gave my heart to any one, it would be his beyond recall."

"That is going to the opposite extreme. How would it be if you should fall in love with a person who proved to be a thief, for instance?" asked M. Vernelle.

Clémence made a slight grimace as if to indicate that such a supposition was absurd; but André turned pale, and averted his face. He remembered that the written admission of his crime was in M. Chantepie's hands, and that the cashier had only to produce it to ruin him. "There is a happy medium between your extravagant ideas and our young friend's exaggerated scruples," remarked M. Vernelle. "Upon this point, I am a kind of arbitrator; and I should recommend you to abide by my decision if you wish to come to an understanding."

"I am ready to make all due concessions, I am sure," laughed Clémence. André dared not reply, but his eyes spoke for him.

"I see that you are really both of the same mind," continued the banker. "You, André, forget that time and circumstances reduce every one to an equality. I but narrowly escaped ruin to-day, and I may be irretrievably ruined to-morrow, while you possess an inalienable capital: youth, intelligence, and industry. With these attributes, a man is sure to make his fortune. As for your feelings, Clémence, I think I understand them thoroughly; but suppose you let me hear a description of your ideal."

"Ah, well, I desire, above all, that my husband should be brave and good. I would have him love me for myself, love me forever, and never love any one but me; for I should be very jealous of him, and I should never forgive him if he deceived me."

"In a word, you are dreaming of perfection. Now as to physical attributes?"

"I should be less exacting in that respect. I should be perfectly satis-

ed if he had a pleasant and intelligent face, distinguished manner, and if he were tall, slender, and had light hair."

"Enough, enough! André will certainly think you are talking about him."

Clémence smiled, instead of replying, but the smile was equivalent to a "yes" spoken at the altar. André cut a rather sorry figure, and most men would have been equally embarrassed under such circumstances, though a fortune-hunter might have emerged from the dilemma by profiting of the opportunity to make an eloquent declaration; André, however, was too much in love to have his wits about him, and his very awkwardness attested his sincerity. M. Vernelle came to his aid. The banker had become serious again, and now looking straight at both of them, he said:

"You understand—do you not?—that I have read your hearts, and that when I thus questioned you in a jesting way, it was for the purpose of inducing you to confess your feelings. This isn't customary, I know, in the society in which we move; but I detest false positions, and I thought it quite time to define yours. Am I mistaken?"

"If we were not here at the theatre, I would certainly kiss you!" exclaimed Clémence.

"Oh, sir," began Subigny in a voice broken with emotion, "how can I ever—"

"No protestations, my dear fellow," interposed the banker, "and above all, don't thank me. That would be premature. I must have a conversation with you to-morrow. There are several facts which you are ignorant of, but which you must know before pledging yourself. In the meantime, you must content yourself with pressing the hand my daughter offers you."

André did not need a second bidding. He was weeping with joy, and Clémence, who was equally disturbed, lowered her eyes to conceal her tears. They forgot, for an instant, that they were plighting their troth before hundreds of spectators, for the theatre was full, and a number of spectators present were taking advantage of the *entr'acte* to turn their opera glasses on the boxes. But what did they care for this scrutiny? They only thought of their happiness. André was overpowered by it, and Clémence, although perhaps not equally unprepared, enjoyed it none the less, for she had not expected that her father would so promptly consent to a desire which she had not yet dared to express.

"Calm yourselves, children, and turn to the audience," continued M. Vernelle. "People are looking at us, and I don't care to personate in public the benignant father who gives away his daughter on the stage."

The lovers turned and simultaneously caught sight of Babiole, who was devouring them with her eyes. She did even more. As André caught her eyes, she bowed to him, smiling. Mademoiselle Vernelle observed her do so, and turning to Subigny she inquired with surprise: "Are you acquainted with that young girl?"

"I have met her once," replied André. "She resides in the house where I stayed a short time with a friend, before living in the Rue Rougemont."

"You have only seen her once, and yet she recognizes you. She must have a remarkable memory. She certainly has a very pretty face. What does she do?"

"She is a milliner, I believe. At least she usually left the house very early with a band-box in her hand, so I always supposed she was going to some shop."

Mademoiselle Vernelle said no more, but André saw very plainly that she suspected him of not telling the whole truth. He could not enter into any

explanation which would only have made the situation more embarrassing, so he remained silent, though he secretly anathematized Bertaud who had provided Babiole and her companion with seats so nearly opposite M. Vernelle's box. It did not seem at all probable that the broker had done this intentionally, however, for he must naturally feel anxious to conceal his capades. It is true, though, that he had not shown himself in the house and indeed everything seemed to indicate that he would content himself with waiting for Babiole at the door of the theatre. The curtain rose again, and all conversation ceased, but Clémence was no longer listening to the music. She had picked up her father's opera glass and had levelled it at an opposite box, the door of which had just been thrown noisily open. André was troubling himself very little about what was going on around him, but as he sat with his eyes fixed on his betrothed, he fancied that he perceived her turning pale. Almost immediately afterwards, Clémence passed the glass to her father, at the same time directing his attention to the box, which a rather noisy party had just entered. M. Vernelle turned the glass on this box, and André noticed, with very natural astonishment, that the longer he gazed the more distressed his countenance became. Indeed, a moment afterwards, the banker rose abruptly, and said to his daughter in a strained, unnatural voice: "Come, let us go."

Clémence had already risen to her feet, with her back turned to the audience. Her father had retreated to the rear of the box, and seemed to be waiting for her impatiently. André, springing up, hastened towards him, exclaiming: "What! sir, are you going?"

"I am compelled to do so," replied Monsieur Vernelle, curtly. "But you had better remain—"

"I don't care to, sir, if you—"

"Remain, I beg. I should much prefer your not accompanying us. Don't ask me for any explanation. I can't give it to you here. To-morrow you shall know everything. I do not regret having come, since I can now call you my son," he added, pressing Sabligny's hand cordially, "but nothing in the world could induce me to remain another moment in this cursed theatre."

Clémence was so deeply agitated that she quite forgot to wish André good-bye: indeed, she left the box almost without looking at him. Her father followed her, and immediately closed the door behind him. All this was done so hastily that André found himself alone before he had time to say another word, or ascertain the cause of this abrupt departure. What could have made the banker leave the theatre in the middle of the performance, and just as he had made his daughter and André happy? The young secretary felt convinced that this hurried flight was in some way connected with the advent of the occupants of the opposite box. Who could these people be? Certainly not creditors, for the banker had none; and it was scarcely probable that he had enemies so dangerous and powerful that he was afraid of meeting them face to face. And yet he had fled, in the literal acceptance of the word,—fled without stopping to look behind him, dragging his daughter away with as much haste and trepidation as if threatened with imminent danger.

How was André to ascertain the truth? The simplest way seemed to be to examine the persons who had perhaps unwittingly produced this effect. As it happened, M. Vernelle, in his agitation, had forgotten to take the glass away with him. Before making use of it, however, André glanced at the box which he saw was occupied by a woman and two men. The woman

as sparkling with diamonds; and her companions were attired in the height of fashion. Subigny became more and more puzzled to understand why this fashionable group had so terrified the banker. He took up the opera glass, and as it was an excellent one, he was able to subject the faces which so greatly interested him to a careful examination. One of the gentlemen was old; the other seemed to be about thirty, certainly not more. The elder one was a thorough aristocrat in appearance, somewhat bald, with a grey moustache and whiskers, keen eyes and a scornful mouth. The younger man was remarkably handsome, with the pallid complexion so many women rave over, very red lips and dazzling white teeth which he seemed fond of showing. His air was irreproachable, and his bearing dignified. But at the same time he seemed too vain of his good looks; and there was something artificial about his bearing. "If he were a Frenchman," thought André, "I would swear that he has not always displayed his dress-coat in presencium boxes; but he is evidently a foreigner, a South American, I should judge from appearance. The other also is a foreigner, but not of the same nationality."

He next extended his scrutiny to the woman, and instantly decided that she must either have been born in France, or have spent several years in Paris. She was perfectly at home in the box, though a number of glances were turned upon her, and her toilet was remarkably tasteful. She must have been extremely beautiful in former years; but of her early charms she only retained her regular features, a regal presence and superb shoulders which she freely displayed. Her face was a work of art due to the skillful use of cosmetics of all the colours of the rainbow; but the effect was tolerably fair from a distance, and the dark-complexioned young man who accompanied her did not seem to object to her paint and powder, for he often leaned over to whisper in her ear. He occupied a seat behind her, and frequently indulged in confidential remarks which did not at all appear to disturb the elderly man, who was devoting his attention to a pretty soubrette, frisking about the stage.

"What a strange trio!" André said to himself. "I can't understand what these persons have in common with Monsieur Vernelle, and, above all, with his daughter, who certainly turned pale on perceiving them. How can she know this superannuated coquette? Clémence has but just entered society, and that stout lady must have shone in it before Clémence was born. I must certainly be on the wrong track; these people can't have driven Mademoiselle Vernelle and her father from the theatre. They may have seen a Medusa's head somewhere, but not in that box; and as I am but little acquainted with their affairs, I will abandon the attempt to find out the truth."

Moreover, there were other matters on his mind; Babiolle had marred his joy by her inopportune greeting. He felt that a vague distrust had stolen into Clémence's heart, and he was a trifle angry with the pretty milliner for having bowed to him so familiarly. Love is selfish, and Subigny began to ask himself if it would not be wrong for him to trouble his promised wife's peace of mind for the sake of defending the possible virtue of a girl for whom he merely felt friendship and gratitude. He glanced at her, and saw that her undivided attention was now given to the opera. She seemed to be absorbed in listening to a delightful melody. Just then, they were singing the famous air:

"Les rendezvous de noble compagnie
Se donnent tous en ce charmant séjour,"

and certainly the words did not remind her of the corpulent speculator who was waiting to invite her to sup with him at the Café du Helder. The he was oppressing André, who, moreover, realized the necessity of having time for reflection before deciding whether he should constitute himself Babiole's champion or not. So he left the box, and entered the public lounge to get a breath of air, expecting there would be no one there before the close of the act. But it was decreed that he should encounter surprise after surprise that evening, for he had scarcely set foot in the lounge than he found himself face to face with M. Bertaud. He tried to avoid him, but the broker came forward and said: "What! is this you, young man? I did not expect to see you at the Opéra Comique this evening. What the devil brought you here?"

"The same that brought you, probably," replied Subligny, drily. "I came to hear the 'Pré-aux-Clercs.'"

"I didn't, and it seems to me that you yourself are not listening to just now. I was in the house for a moment, but did not see you. Where is your seat?"

André was strongly tempted to reply, "What business is it of yours?" but he concluded that it would not be advisable to quarrel openly with a man whose business interests were so closely connected with those of Clémence's father, so he merely answered: "Monsieur Vernelle had the kindness to offer me a seat in his box."

"Vernelle!" exclaimed the broker. "Is Vernelle at the theatre this evening? He must have lost his senses. Is he still here?"

"No, he just left in company with Mademoiselle Clémence."

"So he brought his daughter! That certainly caps the climax!"

"You would oblige me very much, sir, if you would explain your meaning more clearly," said André, impatiently. "Your astonishment seems quite uncalled for."

"Explain! oh, certainly. Know, then, young man, that Vernelle made a tremendous mistake in coming here this evening—a mistake which he now bitterly regrets I assure you."

"And why, if you please?"

"For two reasons. The first, you know only too well. The second is that Madame Vernelle, his wife, is enthroned in one of the boxes, escorted by her protector, and a fellow she favours in secret."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at André's feet, it could not have filled him with greater consternation than this response. He understood at last. M. Chantepie had contented himself with saying that Madame Vernelle had left her husband. Bertaud now openly asserted that she had sunk to the lowest possible level; and everything seemed to indicate that he did not exaggerate the facts. André now realised why Clémence had been so anxious to escape from the sight of her degraded mother. So this was the family skeleton, the stain to which he was probably indebted for a favourable answer to his suit. The millionaire accepted his secretary for a son-in-law because he could find no other.

"I am not surprised that Vernelle left," sneered Bertaud. "A man may, indeed, be a philosophical husband, and yet not like to meet his wife under such circumstances. It serves Vernelle right, though. This will teach him to hire opera boxes on a day like this!"

André did not notice this last remark. He could only think of the ruin that had just overtaken his hopes.

"What is the matter with you?" inquired Bertaud. "One would think

that a brickbat had fallen on your head and stunned you. Your employer stood it for ten years, as every one knows, and he must be used to it by this time. What difference does it make to you, if Vernelle is the laughing stock of all Paris? Ah! if we were talking about his financial embarrassment, I should understand your perturbation, for you must naturally feel anxious as to whether you will retain your situation."

"I can hardly think of self when my benefactor has just been so cruelly wounded," replied André, drily; "and you certainly might have told me about his wife a little less plainly."

"Is it possible that you were ignorant of the matter? Why, Vernelle's domestic misfortunes are known to everybody in Paris. I don't think he cares much about them himself; but it will be a difficult task for him to carry off his daughter, now, especially. His faithless spouse must be pretty bold to return to France. While she was disporting herself in foreign countries, no one thought much about the matter; and in fact, it was almost forgotten. But I was talking just now with a broker I know, who told me that the old hussy was about to take up her abode in the Champs Elysées, at the expense of that old nobleman who is sitting in the box beside her. The other man is a fellow she picked up at Monaco. I don't know what Vernelle will do to stop this scandal: but it must be admitted that the poor fellow has had hard luck for some time past."

Each word uttered by Bertaud stabbled André to the heart. It seemed to him that the speculator took a malicious pleasure in tormenting him; and, moreover, he indulged in sundry covert allusions, which began to excite the young secretary's anxiety. "To be ridiculed and ruined, both at the same time, is certainly too hard," continued the broker.

"Ruined!" exclaimed Subligny. "What do you say?" "I am only saying what everybody knows. Vernelle has been buying heavily of late and at very high prices. He had already met with enormous losses; and to-night, at the close of the Bourse, there was a further fall of two francs. He has also lost heavily by a failure at Marseilles. You can draw your own conclusions, my dear fellow."

"Excuse me, sir," replied André, greatly excited. "Monsieur Vernelle sold out in time, as you must know better than any one else."

"This is the first news I have of it."

"You forget that Monsieur Vernelle gave you orders to sell twice as much as he had purchased."

"He did nothing of the kind. It is his own fault, too, for I warned him. But he is as obstinate as a mule; and he refused to listen to me. So much the worse for him!"

"Indeed, sir," began André, angrily, "Monsieur Vernelle just told me the contrary of what you assert. One of you must have lied to me, and it certainly wasn't he."

"You will soon find out that it wasn't I. I myself did exactly what he refused to do, and have cleared quite a handsome amount by the operation, while he may think himself lucky if he is able to pay up on settling day, at the end of the month. If he does, it will take all he possesses in the world."

"Thanks to the treachery of which he has been the victim."

"What treachery? Do you mean to insinuate that I received an order to sell, and that I didn't execute it?"

"You read my thoughts perfectly."

"Young man, are you aware that you are making a serious charge against me?"

"Perfectly well aware of it, sir."

"You will at least be compelled to prove it."

"Do you dare to assert that you have acted in an honest and honourable manner in protecting your own interests and neglecting those of your partner?"

"Vernelle is not my partner, though he invested a certain amount of money in my business, it is true. He consequently has an interest in it, and he will have his share of my profits from this day's transactions; but the stock with which he so foolishly burdened himself was purchased in my own name, and for his own benefit. I don't play for such high stakes, as I watch over my interests myself. If Vernelle is ruined, he owes it to his unpardonable carelessness. Here is a banker who has been in business thirty years, and who has an immense amount of money at stake, and yet he does not even take the trouble to ascertain if an order of vital importance has been received by his agent, or even to come to the Bourse on the day his fate is to be decided. You must confess that this is, at least, very strange."

"I am not criticising Monsieur Vernelle's conduct, but yours; and I don't hesitate to declare that it has been dastardly in the extreme. You knew that he was very much occupied, and that the fall was likely to continue, and yet you didn't take the trouble to consult your best customer before the Bourse closed."

"I did consult him yesterday. I even begged him to sell, but he wouldn't listen to me. Perhaps he thought better of it during the night; but it was his place to come and see me."

"And after the Bourse closed you didn't inform him of the loss he had sustained?"

"I sent him a report as usual; he will find it on his return home. He would have received it much earlier, if the unfortunate idea of coming to the Opéra Comique hadn't occurred to him. He chose a strange time to take his daughter to the theatre."

"But you are here!"

"It is very different with me, young man. I have made a deal of money to-day, and I certainly have a right to enjoy myself, and I can't see why I should deprive myself of a little innocent amusement merely because old Vernelle has been unfortunate in some of his speculations."

"Very well; I have no desire to interfere with your amusement; but you will see what Monsieur Vernelle thinks of your conduct."

"He can think whatever he likes. It makes no difference to me; I have been perfectly square in all my dealings with him. And now I have only one word of advice to give you. You are young, and too enthusiastic. You will learn, to your cost, that it is not advisable to espouse other people's interests too warmly. Vernelle is overboard, and you yourself had better try to save yourself from drowning. Still, you are, of course, at perfect liberty to do as you please." As Bertaud concluded, he turned on his heel and left the lounge.

André felt a wild desire to kick him out of the theatre, but the grief that oppressed his heart overcame his anger, and he allowed the scoundrel to depart without the chastisement he deserved. What was André to do now? Give up Clémence, retire from the field? No; M. Vernelle's financial ruin would not deter him from marrying her. But how were the father and daughter to be delivered from Madame Vernelle. If he did not succeed in freeing them of her, how could he marry Clémence? What

could his mother say when she learned the disgrace that tainted his bride's parentage. And she could not fail to learn this sooner or later, for, according to the law, Clémence must have the consent of this woman who had brought her into the world, but who was so utterly unlike her. Madame Subligny undoubtedly imagined that the banker was a widower, as she had never spoken to her son about any Madame Vernelle. What a blow it would be to her when she learned the truth! These harrowing thoughts subdued André to despair. Indeed, he began to fear that he was going mad; and anxious to leave this lounge where his happiness had received its death-blow, he returned to the box just as the act was concluding. He would have found it difficult to explain what impelled him to return to the place where he had sat only a few moments before beside the girl he loved; but it was probably the same instinct that makes the wretched revisit the places where they have suffered. The party in the opposite box was still there. Babiole was chatting with her companion, but she must have suddenly become conscious of André's presence, for she turned and glanced up at him. But instead of smiling, as she had done the first time, she made a gesture that seemed to signify: "I wish to speak to you. Wait for me at the door of the theatre."

André was quite willing to comply with this request. In the first place, there was no longer any reason for postponing it; and, as Madame Vernelle had gone off, and in the second place, he was delighted to find an opportunity of making him tell everything to M. Vernelle, for he suspected that Babiole's chaparrone had said something about taking supper with the gentleman who had presented the bouquet, and that the girl, determined not to accept the invitation, wished to make use of his, André's, protection in leaving the theatre. The young secretary looked round for Bertaud, and soon discerned him in the orchestra, as it were, in a dark corner, like a wily spider watching for a poor little fly. He even fancied that he detected the broker exchanging signs with the great woman who accompanied Babiole, and he secretly vowed to defeat her vile plans. He pretended not to see Bertaud, and yielding to the strange fascination that an unpleasant sight always exercises over a nervous man, he gazed at the occupants of the opposite box. The elderly man was dozing, while the younger one was standing in a studied attitude. As for the woman, she was using her opera-glass perseveringly, and it was not long before Babligny discovered that it was certainly levelled at him. Why was she gazing at him so persistently? It was quite impossible that she had seen either her husband or her daughter, for she had scarcely taken her seat when they left the box. Consequently, she could not be studying him on their account. The young fellow who was standing beside her, evidently became annoyed by her persistence, for he bent down to whisper something to her; but she made a gesture of impatience, and persisted in her scrutiny. André, however, turned his back to the box, and giving Babligny a glance which plainly implied, "Rely on me;" he took up the opera-glass long taken by Clémence, and left the theatre. A moment afterwards he installed himself behind the newspaper-kiosk from which he had witnessed Bertaud's introduction to Babiole. Several itinerant newsvendors now passed by shouting: "Great panic at the Bourse. Latest News from Tonquin!" The latest news from Tonquin had not the slightest interest for André, but the announcement of the panic only aroused his anxiety afresh, and reminded him that M. Vernelle still considered himself rich. What a blow the truth would prove on the morrow! As André thought of it he was vaguely

tempted to strangle the traitor Bertaud, who, he felt certain, had betrayed his partner.

When the spectators began to leave the theatre, André stationed himself at the corner of the Rue Marivaux, so that Babiole could not pass by without seeing him. He had scarcely taken his stand there when he perceived M. Bertaud at the door of the staircase leading to the private rooms of the Café Anglais. Bertaud on his side could see him, but evinced no inclination to cross the street and engage in conversation. Five minutes later Babiole appeared, leaning on the stout woman's arm, and came straight toward André, in spite of the efforts of her companion to get her across the street. André stepped forward to meet her, bowed to her as deferentially as he would have bowed to any fine lady, and quietly said: "I am at your service, mademoiselle."

Babiole instantly relinquished her hold on her companion's arm and took André's, saying, as she did so: "I thank you, madame, for the very pleasant evening I have passed; but it isn't necessary for you to trouble yourself any further. I am very near home; besides, this gentleman will have the kindness to see me safely to my own door."

"Why, mademoiselle," exclaimed the matron, "you know very well that we are expected—"

"To take supper with a friend of yours. Yes, madame, but I am not hungry, and I feel sleepy. So pray allow me to wish you good-night—and a good appetite," added the girl, mischievously.

Bertaud had hastened up to listen to the conversation. He had come with the very evident intention of interfering, and Subligny was preparing to snub him effectually, when Babiole turned to the broker, and said: "Good evening, sir. I regret that you should have been put to so much unnecessary trouble."

While speaking, she dragged André away before he had time to open his lips. Nevertheless, he heard the broker mutter an oath together with an opprobrious epithet, which was evidently applied to him. Quite enraged, Subligny tried to free himself from his companion, but Babiole clung tightly to his arm, and whispered: "No quarrel on my account, I entreat you."

After hastily crossing the boulevard, amid vehicles proceeding in every direction, the two young people reached the Rue Laffitte. "I arrived just in time," remarked André, not exactly knowing what to say.

"I am not afraid while you are with me," replied Babiole. "Still, I should have managed to get out of the scrape very well without assistance. I am in the habit of protecting myself."

"Who was that woman with you?"

"Madame Divet, my employer. She will be very angry; but it makes no difference to me. Had she given me any hint that she intended to take supper with that old wretch after the performance, I wouldn't have gone to the theatre with her."

"Then you were not acquainted with that gentleman?"

"I have seen him at the shop. He calls there very often; but if I had known that he was in league with my employer—"

"Will you allow me to advise you to change your place of employment?"

"I am strongly thinking of doing so, but it isn't a very easy matter. I receive very good pay at Madame Divet's, and I'm not at all sure of finding as good a place anywhere else. Besides, I haven't had any real cause to complain of her as yet. Still I should not hesitate to leave her if I really thought that she had any bad designs. But enough on this subject. Will

"Tell me what you have been doing with yourself for the past month? You promised to come and see me, you remember?"

"I have been to the Rue Lamartine several times; but was never fortunate enough to find you at home."

"Oh, you came once to get your trunk. You have made a fortune, it seems. I noticed you in one of the swell boxes, with very brilliant company."

"I have obtained a situation in the office of the gentleman you saw me at the theatre. He is a banker, and—"

"And he has a very charming daughter. I congratulate you."

Anxious to change the subject, André hastily inquired: "And what have you been doing since I saw you, mademoiselle?"

"Oh, I have had one trouble after another. In the first place my uncle quite ill. While out collecting, he took a severe cold, and yesterday he went to the hospital, where he can be better cared for than at home. Tomorrow is Sunday, visiting-day, and I am going to see him. Then, too, I missed you very much after you went away. I hadn't known you long, it is true, but I very quickly became attached to people I like. I hope you no longer think of killing yourself?"

"No, mademoiselle, but I have not forgotten that you saved my life."

"It was all due to chance. If I hadn't had a bonnet to finish that night, should have gone to bed at nine o'clock: then Heaven only knows what could have happened. Your friend Monsieur Marbeuf was less fortunate. It seems that he is dead. The doorkeeper told me yesterday that his furniture was to be sold."

"I thank you for informing me of that, but I don't yet despair of finding Marbeuf. I believe that some unforeseen business compelled him to leave Paris suddenly, and that he will soon return."

"I hope so with all my heart. Now I am going to be unpardonably inquisitive. May I venture to ask if you have since seen the gentleman I found with you when I called that morning to inquire how you had spent the night?"

"I see him every day, and, by the way, I recollect you told me that he was a bad man; but—"

"I could say no more at that time, because he was present. I hardly think that he recognized me, but I hope that you did not tell him my name!"

"How could I, when I did not even know it myself?"

"I am glad to hear that, for it is not at all likely that he remembered me. I was only six years old when he used to come to our house. I have changed a good deal since then, but he hasn't altered in the least. He still has the same false, crafty face."

"Why do you dislike him so much?"

"He ruined my father, who blew his brains out six months afterwards. Yes, he urged him to intrust his little fortune to him to speculate with. My poor father lost everything, and this Chantepie made money by it." André started. It was almost the same story as that of Bertaud's connection with M. Vernelle, and Bertaud and Chantepie were evidently fast friends. "I don't know what your connection with him may be," continued Babiole, "but it is my duty to tell you, 'Beware of him. He is a scoundrel and a hypocrite.'"

André had already formed a strong opinion of his own respecting the cashier. However, he did not communicate it to Babiole. In fact, it would have taken him too long to explain matters, and they had already

reached the corner of the Rue Lamartine. "I thank you for the warning and will profit by it," he replied. "May I venture, before leaving you to ask your permission to call and see you?"

"Whenever you like, providing it isn't to-morrow, for I shall spend morning at the shop and the afternoon at the hospital with my uncle. Next Sunday he will be well again, I hope, and in that case I shall be home all day, and shall be very glad to see you. Thank you, here's door," added the girl, shaking hands with André.

He stood gazing after her for a moment as she entered the house, and then turned sadly towards the Rue Rougemont. He was thinking of threatening morrow, and it seemed to him that his last hope had departed with Babiole.

V.

It is eight o'clock, and the dull, grey light of a foggy morning steals into the long room bordered with two parallel rows of white-curtained iron beds. The well polished door shines like a mirror. At one end there is a door and several cupboards; at the other a kind of square compartment provided with water taps and basins; this latter is the dressing-room of the poor. Through the windows, open at the top, the air glides in, freighted with the balmy odours of spring. Several nurses are moving noiselessly about, others are arranging medicine bottles on an *étagère*. It is the St. Ferdinand ward of the Necker Hospital, which stands at the end of the Rue de Sèvres. The hour for the chief physician's visit is fast approaching, and preparations are being made to receive him. All the patients are in bed, even those who are well able to rise and to walk about, for such is the rule. Clinical studies require this, for the pupils must be grouped round a patient's bed in order to hear their instructor's remarks.

Those who are convalescent are sitting up in bed, and some of them are talking with their neighbours. They bid each other good-morning, and exchange bits of news and even jests, which are always rather coarse, and not unfrequently quite funereal in character. The curtains of one bed are closely drawn, and the patients all know why. Number Ten died last night in a hospital, as in a prison, you cease to be a man and become a number.

"Well, old Fourteen, how are you this morning?" says one fellow.

"Tolerable, tolerable, Number Twelve. Though I must say I should not object to a good drink at the wine shop."

"You had better not ask for one here. They will give you a pot of herb-tea."

As an accompaniment to these jeering remarks, one can hear the groans of Number Sixteen, who is suffering terribly.

Suddenly two attendants enter, bearing a sort of litter, on which rests a roughly made coffin, which they deposit near the closed bed. "Here comes the domino-box!" exclaim several patients, who will probably soon be laid away to rest in a similar receptacle.

The dead man is ready for the dissecting-room. His toilet had been made the night before by one of the nurses. He is laid in his coffin, and then borne away, while a consumptive, who has not a fortnight to live, huskily calls out: "Passengers for Clamart* all aboard."

* The dissecting establishment annexed to the Paris hospitals is situated at Clamart, in the suburbs.—*Trans.*

It is not that these poor creatures are heartless, but they have become accustomed to such sights. In their own homes, if they saw a relative die, they would mourn his loss far more sincerely than do many rich people, who expect a share of the deceased's property. But in the hospital, as on the battle-field, persons must expect to die, and so it is there you must go to learn how little human life is worth. Who of us has not witnessed the last moments of some loved one? Relatives are kneeling about the bed, striving to repress their sobs; despair is depicted on every face. It almost seems to every one that the world is about to end with the departure of the loved one who is still clinging to life. And, when the soul takes flight in a faint sigh, shrieks escape from every lip, and tears flow from every eye. There is nothing of that kind in a hospital, however. Death is only what one must expect in the natural course of things. Death is ever present. It touches a bed, and the bed becomes empty. It will have another occupant to-morrow, however—another occupant who may go off in the same way. But what does that matter to the survivors? They have become familiar with the idea of parting, and quietly await their time, without longing for it, like soldiers who see their comrades falling around them. Their end is usually silent and lonely, for nearly all die without a moan, at night-time, while those around them are asleep. But they, perhaps, depart on their last journey with less regret, for they do not witness the harrowing grief and despair of those they love, and whom they must part from.

The clock strikes nine, and the head physician enters, followed by a crowd of medical students. He has a white apron tied around his waist. The house-doctor and house-chemist walk beside him, note-books in hand, to jot down his directions. The students crowd closely upon their heels, for Dr. Valbrègue's class in clinics is very popular. Some of the young fellows are shabbily dressed, and not a few of them have sunken eyes and haggard faces, for there was a public ball at the Jardin Bullier last night. Profound silence reigns in the ward. The patients know that the physician tolerates no facetious remarks, and they also realise that their lives are in his hands. Dr. Valbrègue pauses at each bedside, questions the patient, or examines him, and explains the case to his followers. He speaks rapidly and lucidly, though he uses technical terms in order that the patient may not hear his death-warrant. He says, for instance: "The tubercles are in a state of ramolescence," and the poor man, afflicted with pulmonary consumption, does not understand that those words are a sentence against which there is no appeal. Frequently also, Dr. Valbrègue calls upon one of his pupils to give a diagnosis of the case, and, if the young fellow makes any mistake, gently corrects him; nor does he ever forget, before passing on, to cheer the patient's spirits by a few words of encouragement. His is, in every respect, a model visit.

On the day we refer to, it was less interesting than usual. The ward sheltered such common-place maladies as affections of the chest, intermittent fevers, and so on; but in the beds first visited, there was not a single remarkable case, or uncommon ailment. In fact, the doctor was reserving for the last, the only one worthy of particular attention.

Number Ten had died, as Dr. Valbrègue had predicted the day before; and Number Sixteen was about to die; that was evident to any one. Number Twenty was a new patient; a man about forty years of age, who had been admitted to the hospital the preceding day, upon a ticket bearing the words: "Pleuro-pneumonia." The doctor examined him

carefully, gave a prescription, and then inquired, kindly: "What is you calling, my good fellow?"

"I am now a collector, sir, but I was formerly a quarter-master the Seventh Cuirassiers."

"And it was in running about to collect money that you caught the cold, I suppose?"

"Yes; I think so."

"Well, you will be out again in a week. There was a mistake your ticket of admission. You have only a severe attack of bronchitis. But it would be as well for you to change your calling. You have a predisposition to inflammation of the lungs, which will cause you a great deal of trouble if you are not careful."

"I should be very glad to retire, I assure you, but I have no money and I must earn my living in some way."

"Nonsense! you can earn it as a copyist or book-keeper. I will speak to one of my friends, a banker, about you."

"Thank you, sir. I shall require no urging, I assure you."

Dr. Valbrègue passed on. The ward contained forty beds; the even numbers on one side, the uneven ones on the other. Number Twenty was consequently the last patient of one of the rows, and his bed was directly opposite that of Number Nineteen. The latter was afflicted with a malady of an unusual kind; he was one of those patients who only find shelter in the Paris hospitals for a time, for he looked the picture of health. He was a young and stalwart man, with bright eyes, and a heavy, black, untrimmed beard which naturally gave him a rather wild air. He was in bed, of course, like the others; but he seemed very anxious to get up, for he was moving restlessly about. "Well," said the doctor, feeling his pulse, "how are you progressing, my dear— Pray tell me your name, I always forget it."

"And I, also, have forgotten it, as you know very well, for that is the reason you keep me here," replied the patient.

"Nothing would give me more pleasure than to sign your ticket of dismissal; but where would you go?"

"True: I have also forgotten where I used to live. But that needn't make any difference. I can't remain in a hospital forever. You had better send me away, doctor. I shall manage very well, I dare say. I didn't live upon air before I came here. I must have earned my living in some way."

"But how?"

"I cannot say. It seems to me, though, that I kept books."

"Yes, you must have been a clerk, I think. But where? In one of the government offices?"

"All I can tell you is that I worked in an office. There are times when I can see the place, it seems to me. There were a lot of green cardboard boxes in it."

"This is a sign of improvement, gentlemen," said the doctor, turning to his pupils.

"It even seems to me that if I could be taken there I might recognize it."

"That is the very difficulty, my friend; if you could only recollect in what part of Paris you lived, I would take you there myself, and it would be very strange if your memory did not return to you when you passed your old home. Come, now, try to remember."

"I don't do anything else. My poor brain is constantly at work trying;

solve the mystery. Occasionally, some chance word awakens a vague collection. I strive to seize hold of it, but then it fades away, almost instantly. I am like a man lost in a mine, and endeavouring to grope his way out amid the darkness."

"And you have no recollection of the past?" inquired the doctor.

"No. It seems to me, now, that my life began when I regained consciousness here on this bed. And yet, I'm not insane, for I realize my condition perfectly, and even the condition of those around me. I know that I was brought to the Necker hospital in a state of complete insensibility, and that I had been picked up on the Boulevard des Invalides. I know that you are a celebrated physician, and that a man died here in the ward last night. More than that, I have followed and understood all the theories you have advanced in the presence of these gentlemen, with regard to my malady. I know that I fell, and that in my fall that part of my brain in which the faculty of memory is located received a shock from which it has not recovered."

"And how about all the rest?"

"I know nothing whatever about that. I don't even know who or what was before the accident."

The students were all attention; never before had they had acquaintance with such a puzzling case. Dr. Valbrègue keenly watched his patient and vainly tried to devise some plan which would connect the past with the present, the known with the unknown, and dispel the darkness shrouding this unfortunate young man's mind. "You express yourself so well that you must have received a good education," the doctor remarked at last.

"That is very probable," was the reply.

"At what school or college were you educated?"

"I don't remember."

"Have you forgotten your parents and relatives? Don't you recollect anything of your childhood?"

"Nothing whatever."

The doctor paused, realizing that these questions were futile. "And your sweetheart," he suddenly asked, "don't you regret her?"

"I never had one."

"Are you sure?"

"At least, I have no remembrance of having had one."

"And yet you know what a sweetheart is?"

"Certainly. Last Thursday a very pretty woman came to see Number Ten, the patient who died last night, and I really enjoyed looking at her."

"But you didn't know her, I suppose?"

"No, not at all."

"Do you think that if you had ever seen her before you would have recognized her?"

"I think so; but I'm not sure."

"That would be a good experiment, and chance may furnish you with the opportunity. Do you remain in the ward on visiting days?"

"Not always. I walk in the garden as often as I can. The open air does me good."

"Yes, I understand that; but try to be here at the hours when visitors are admitted."

"I won't fail to do so, of course, if you wish it, sir."

"It is for your own sake entirely that I make the request. Some one

may come here who will recognize you, and speak to you ; and even then may be enough to bring your past back to you, and restore your memory. Then you can leave the hospital where you find it rather dull, I fear."

"Yes ; I am positively dying of ennui and mortification."

"Well, you can then re-enter social life, where I feel sure that you occupied an honourable position, and regain your lost identity."

"That is what I long for above everything else, and if it doesn't happen I don't know what will become of me. You will perhaps finish by sending me to a mad-house. I am not a lunatic now, but I might become one."

"I promise you to do all in my power to prevent that. I will even try to find a situation for you if you desire it. You haven't forgotten how to read and write, so that you could be employed. Besides, it might be the most effectual way of restoring your memory."

"I should be very glad to try and work."

"Then I will see what I can do for you ; but I should like you to remain here a fortnight longer. You will be the gainer, and science will also profit by it."

"Yes, I know that my case will figure in the medical annals, and that you will report it to the Academy. It is an honour that I don't at all care about, but you are so kind to me that I will do whatever you wish."

"It is settled, then. Trust me and have a little patience. Quiet, moderate exercise, and a substantial diet—but above all, quiet, that's what you need now. Don't rack your brain in the hope of reviving your memory. Wait for some incident to do that for you."

With these concluding words, the doctor left the bedside, and finished his round. When all the patients had been examined, Dr. Valbrègue laid aside his apron in the ante-room and turned to the crowd of students around him, saying :

"You have just seen, gentlemen, a case unparalleled in the annals of science. The loss of memory in consequence of a fall, or of a blow, has been frequently observed ; but one of two things usually happens : either the lost faculty gradually returns after a short delay, or, on the contrary, in the same space of time, intelligence becomes totally extinct, and the injured person remains an idiot. Now, with the patient we have just been examining, the case is very different. Thirty-three days after his accident, he is still in the same condition. The malady is stationary. The injury done to the brain was only partial at the outset, and partial it remains. It will be very interesting to know the result of this extraordinary case ; and I need not add that I do not intend to lose sight of the patient after he leaves the hospital."

"If any one of you has any remarks to offer I will listen to them with pleasure," added the doctor, after a pause.

"I have one," said one of the students, timidly.

"Speak, my friend."

"I should like to ask if this case does not strongly resemble one of pretended madness."

"That is not a bad suggestion for a student in his first year. You mean that this man has retained his memory, and that he merely pretended to have lost it. Upon what do you found your opinion, may I ask ?"

"It seems to me that this man may have some object in concealing his identity. He was probably wounded in some brawl, for when he was brought here his clothes were torn and stained with mud. It is possible that he killed or wounded some one seriously, before his fall. Who knows,

indeed, but he may have fallen in scaling some wall, with the intention of committing robbery or murder."

"You have read Gaborian's novels, I see, young man," replied Dr. Valbrègue, smiling. "Your conjecture is ingenious, but it is not based on scientific observation. Besides, I can set your mind at rest on this point. At first, I was under the same impression as yourself—and so, indeed, were others—but I investigated the matter, making inquiries at the prefecture of police. I found that nothing whatever was known there about our patient, and that on the night of his accident there was no street fight, and not even an attempt at robbery reported to the authorities; so, it is only reasonable to conclude that he speaks the truth when he declares that he remembers nothing. You will see that the future will confirm my diagnosis, or I feel sure that my patient will be recognized sooner or later. Now good-bye until to-morrow, gentlemen."

The crowd that had gathered round the doctor hastily dispersed; the students moving away in little groups, busily engaged in discussing their professor's views on this interesting subject.

Meanwhile the physician repaired to his carriage, escorted by the house doctor and house chemist. The latter seemed to give all his thoughts to his work. His hair was dishevelled and his clothing shabby, while his hands bore marks of the chemical experiments to which he zealously devoted himself. The house doctor, on his side, was a short, dark-complexioned man, much neater in appearance than his companion, and endowed with an intelligent and prepossessing face. "What do you think of the case, my dear Bosc?" Dr. Valbrègue asked him. "Have you any hope that we shall eventually solve the enigma?"

"Balzac indicates a mode of cure which seems an excellent one to me," was the smiling response.

"Balzac! So you, also, study novels with a view to curing the sick?"

"Well, he tells the story of a woman who had become mad, when our troops crossed the Beresina in 1812, and when her husband perished before her very eyes. Twenty years afterwards, some one conceived the idea of representing in her presence the catastrophe which had caused the loss of her reason, with the adjuncts of a simulated river and ice."

"And on witnessing the sight, she suddenly recovered her reason. That would answer admirably on the stage; but, in the first place, our man is not mad, and secondly, I should like to know how you would manage to show him the scene of his accident. He, himself, has no idea what happened to him, or where it happened."

"But he will recollect, perhaps—and then, by taking him to the place where he was found—"

"In the meantime, my dear fellow, you had better reperuse some of the numerous works on diseases of the brain. They are the best authorities, after all. And as you are on duty to-day, Sunday, do me the favour to go up to the ward while the visitors are there. Watch them without appearing to do so, and devise some way of calling Number Nineteen's attention to them; if you should detect any sign of a revival of his memory, pray do your best to awaken it thoroughly."

"Very well, sir, I will do so."

As they were crossing the courtyard, Dr. Valbrègue turned to the house chemist, and said:

"I was almost forgetting to give you this little packet, my dear Housais. It contains a bromide power which I prescribed for one of my

patients. It disagrees with him strangely. Whenever he takes any it, he complains of a terrible contraction of the muscles of the throat and spasms of the jaw."

"Those are the usual effects of strychnine."

"I know it; and for that very reason I want you to analyse the compound. Do me the favour to hand me, in writing, to-morrow morning the result of your analysis."

"It will be ready for you to-day. I am going to the laboratory now."

"If you don't use the entire powder, you had better send me what you have left, in case it should be necessary to have another analysis," marked the doctor.

With this final recommendation, Dr. Valbrègue took leave of the two young men, who hastened to the guard-room, to have a smoke before breakfast, and, while they were inhaling the fragrant weed, the existence of the patients resumed its wonted course.

All days are very much alike in a hospital. Still, on Sunday the inmates tidy themselves as much as possible to receive their friends—at least, those that have any, and, to the credit of the Parisians, must be said, that such is the case with the great majority of the invalids. As Béranger says, the poor are not happy, but as a celebrated refractor expresses it: "They love one another." Number Nineteen was not favoured, however. No one had called to see him, since he had been an inmate of the hospital; but this was probably due to the fact that his former acquaintances did not know his whereabouts.

After eating the cutlet brought him for his breakfast, he went down into the garden as usual. He was in the habit of spending most of his time there, smoking a brier-wood pipe he had purchased, out of the sixty francs found in his pocket when he entered the hospital.

All the convalescents lingered in the garden from morning until night. Some walked up and down the paths, others sat on the benches and read. But Number Nineteen did not associate with any of them, not because the education was inferior to his own, but because he did not know what to say to them. What can a man talk about when he has no recollection of the past, when he has entirely forgotten his former avocation, and even who he is? The patients who frequented the garden were nearly all of the working-men, who discussed the matters that interested them most: salaries, employers' faults and foremen's brutality; the condition of the wife at home, now that the bread-winner was laid up, and so on. The fellows did not seek Number Nineteen's society, although he showed a disposition to put on airs, as they expressed it, for he always answered civilly when he was spoken to, and he never refused tobacco to those who asked him for any. But his face did not suit their fancy, and his casual curiosity as it was, interested them but slightly, as they did not understand it. Indeed, many of them did not believe in it. They did not, like Dr. Valbrègue's student, imagine that Number Nineteen was a criminal, striving to conceal his identity; they rather fancied he was a detective, disguised as a patient, in order to play the spy at his ease. To play the spy upon whom? might be asked. They did not specify any particular person; they could not. But the natural result of all this was that the poor fellow was almost always alone.

That Sunday afternoon, the whole hospital was crowded with visitors—worthy people who had taken advantage of this opportunity to bring such friends or relatives as they had among the invalids, consolation and food, more

special food—on account of the general and very erroneous impression, that the department of public charities starves the sick confided to its care. The Saint Ferdinand ward was crowded with new comers. Out of the forty beds, there were but six that were not surrounded by visitors. There were wives, and mothers, and children without number, but not nearly as many men. Not that men have not equally kind hearts, but the wine-shops sometimes stop them on the way. Everyone present had his or her hands full. Certain gifts are not prohibited, such as jam, tobacco, and flowers—provided there are not too many of them, and their perfume is not too strong—and there was quite a display of gifts upon the pedestals and on the shelves over the head of each bed.

The attendants were polite, as they are looking forward to the weekly gratuity brought by the relatives, and the whole ward wore a gala air. Death, however, was close at hand, on that day, as on every other, and there was weeping, but the mourners covered their faces with their handkerchiefs.

Number Twenty, who occupied the last bed on the row to the right, was alone; but he evidently expected some one, for he had combed his hair carefully, and was now sitting up leaning against his pillows. Suddenly a young girl appeared on the threshold of the ward, and after hesitating a moment, walked with an uncertain step up the room, between the two rows of little white beds. It was easy to see that this was her first visit to the hospital, and that she did not know exactly where to look for the friend she was seeking, for she glanced at the numbers of the beds as she passed along. A woman, who was still young, and who was miserably clad, had entered the ward at almost the same moment and walked along beside her. This latter person knew very well where she wished to go, however; but the further she advanced, the paler she grew. Suddenly she paused a few steps from bed Number Ten. It had been freshly made and it was empty. The woman gazed fixedly at the white sheets and curtains, but she dared advance no further. As an attendant passed, she gave him a questioning look, and he replied in subdued tones: "Last night at three o'clock." She made no rejoinder, but tottered as if about to fall, and two big tears rolled down her cheeks.

The young girl beside her understood, and her heart sunk; but almost immediately she caught sight of Number Twenty, and hastened to him. "So here you are, little one!" he exclaimed, kissing her affectionately. "I was sure that I should see you to-day; but I am none the less grateful to you for coming. It shows that you haven't forgotten your Uncle Auguste."

"Forget you! the only friend I have left in the world now that mother is dead. Yesterday, when I received your letter, I wanted to go and see you at once, but Madame Divet told me I should be refused admission; and as you said in your letter that your illness was not serious—"

"It is nothing at all, my little Babiole. The doctor promised me this morning that I should be out in a week. I had a very comfortable night, too, but yesterday I thought I was in a very bad way."

"But why didn't you remain at home instead of shutting yourself up in this horrid hospital? I would have come and nursed you."

"You had something else to do; besides, my room is too small, and an old trooper like myself isn't afraid of a hospital. But tell me some news. How is Madame Divet? And when are you to be promoted to the position of forewoman?"

"Never, perhaps. I am by no means sure that I shall remain any longer in the shop."

"Why?" asked Uncle Auguste, frowning. "Do you want to go to the bad?"

"It is precisely because I don't want to go to the bad that I think leaving Madame Divet."

"What!" exclaimed Uncle Auguste, "has that old fatty been giving you bad advice?"

"Worse than that. She had two tickets for the Opéra Comique yesterday, and she invited me to go with her. I ought to have refused, but she urged me so strongly that I finally consented, and I was well punished for it. Would you believe it, the seats were given her by a gentleman who was waiting for us outside when we left the theatre so as to take us to supper with him."

"Did you go?"

"Not I. In the first place I don't sup with gentlemen, and even if I wanted to I wouldn't have supped with that one. He was too old, too ugly, and too common-looking. Madame Divet told me he was a rich broker, but he looked more like a butcher. At all events I wished my employer good night and left her. How she must have fumed, and the man too!"

"You did quite right, Babiole; and you will do still better to leave her. I'll find you another place as soon as I leave the hospital, and I'll tell the old wretch what I think of her, too. You see it isn't safe to trust her appearances. And to think that I chose the place for you! But you sha'n't remain there a day longer. I don't intend my poor sister's daughter to be exposed to dangers of that kind. If you go astray, child, you will be the first in our family to do so."

"There is no danger, uncle, and I promise you—"

Babiole suddenly paused. She had just become aware that a young man with a white apron was gazing at her with annoying persistency. It was Bosc, making the round prescribed by his superior. Having unexpectedly discovered a pretty girl, he was feasting his eyes upon her; but as she immediately turned her back on him, he vented his ill-humour upon a nurse who happened to be passing at the time. "Why isn't Number Nineteen here?" he inquired, angrily.

"He is in the garden," stammered the attendant.

"Fetch him at once, and don't let him leave the ward again until after visiting hours."

The attendant sulkily obeyed, and Bosc walked away, not without turning more than once to catch another glimpse of the pretty girl who had attracted his attention; but as she obstinately declined to look at him, he went to announce his discovery to some of his comrades, resolving to return and take another glance before the departure of the visitors. "Is that young man the doctor?" inquired Babiole.

"Well, he is a doctor, but not the head one, he's a sort of assistant."

"Are patients forbidden to walk in the garden?"

"No, certainly not. Number Nineteen was sent for at the especial request of the head-physician."

"Number Nineteen?"

"Yes; the patient who occupies the bed opposite mine. I am Number Twenty. A man isn't known by his name here; besides, this fellow hasn't any name."

"No name? Impossible!"

"It is exactly as I tell you. Look at his card. It bears the date of his mission and the name of his malady; but the place where the name and profession are usually given is left empty, while upon mine you can read in large letters, Auguste Brochard, collector."

"But how can this unfortunate man have forgotten his name—for I suppose he has forgotten it?"

"It is a strange story. It seems that he fell and injured his head, and total loss of memory followed. This morning the doctor talked to him ten minutes or more, and I heard all he said. He may be a very learned man; but in my opinion, this patient is fooling him completely. He pretends to remember nothing, but he is no more mad than I am. He is only pretending."

"But what can be his object?"

"Probably to conceal some crime he committed before coming here. I have an idea that he is some defaulting cashier who has taken refuge here, while the police are hunting for him in Belgium or America. I don't know for certain, but it seems to me I have seen him somewhere or other."

"Haven't you tried to talk with him?"

"Not yet. I only came yesterday; besides, I take no interest in his affairs. I'm not working for the police."

"You are quite right. I'm sure that I could never make up my mind to denounce any one—not even a thief."

"Besides, rich people don't deserve much consideration. They are so mean and unscrupulous. Do you remember that scoundrel Chantepie who ruined your father?"

"Oh, yes, for I saw him only a short time ago."

"And I hope you turned your back on him. After his rascality of ten years ago, we thought he would go abroad. But he did nothing of the kind it seems. He is now in a very respectable banking-house—Vernelle's in the Rue Bergère, and the strangest thing of it all is that he is cashier there. I went there the other day to collect a note, and he paid me."

"Did he recognise you?"

"No, I think not; at least, he said nothing to me; but I longed to pumel him and then go and warn Vernelle that his safe was in very unsafe hands. On reflection, however, I decided to keep quiet. There was no chance of Chantepie's repaying the money he stole from your father, for, even at the time, we were unable to prove that he had put it in his pocket instead of losing it at the Bourse, as he pretended. Besides, Vernelle is nothing to me. He has misplaced his confidence, and he must suffer for it. I heard only the day before yesterday at the Bank that he had lost heavily at the Bourse; so much the worse for him."

"Poor man! It was doubtless that wretch Chantepie who urged him to speculate—just as he urged my poor father—and he has probably enriched himself at his employer's expense. He, also, has a daughter, perhaps—this Monsieur Vernelle, I mean—"

"Yes, he has; but she will never know want, for Vernelle is very wealthy. The loss of two or three millions won't prevent his daughter from making a brilliant match, while you, Babiole, are reduced to work for an old hussy who is trying to make money out of your beauty. Ah! won't you give her a piece of my mind when I get out of this place!"

"I assure you that it would not be worth while, uncle, as I shall not return to her. You will find me another place; and in the meantime, you need feel no anxiety about me. I have a little money laid by."

"Yes, I know that you are very prudent; but in some other shop it would be just the same. You are very pretty, and as sure to attract men as a candle attracts moths."

"Ah, well, moths generally come to grief in the candle," was Babiole's laughing response.

"Yes; but a girl like you can't intend to remain an old maid."

"Oh, I have plenty of time to consider that subject, for a girl can't be called an old maid before she is twenty-five, and I was only sixteen last September."

"Well, yes, you are still rather too young; but all the same, I should be delighted to take you to the mayor's office if I knew any worthy young man who wanted you. But perhaps you are ambitious, and unwilling to marry a mere clerk."

"Certainly not, if I loved him. I am not foolish enough to imagine that an ambassador will ask for my hand."

"Some ambassadors have been known to marry women much inferior to you in every respect. But if any swell should ask me for you, I should refuse him flatly. I know these men. They would desert you in less than six months. What I should prefer for you, is a young fellow, not rich, but capable of becoming so by reason of industry and steady habits."

"That would suit me, provided he was kind, well-bred, and not ugly."

"Of course. Well, such a person can be found perhaps. I will have a look for one."

"Yes, uncle, look for one," said Babiole. "I shall not attempt it. I am too much afraid of making a mistake."

"You are right. At your age, it is difficult to distinguish the counterfeit from the genuine article; and providing the coin shines, one does not think of testing it. So it is settled. You are to remain quietly at home until I leave here. But how will you pass the time away?"

"Oh, you need have no fears. I never feel bored. I have my rooms to take care of; my birds must be fed, and I sing and read—"

"Novels, I suppose. That is a pity. They are sure to turn young girls' heads sooner or later."

"I don't care much for novels. I read plays."

"They are no better. By the way, are you on neighbourly terms with any of the other tenants in the house?"

"I have no neighbour, now."

"What! are you all alone on the fourth floor?"

"The rooms opposite mine were occupied by a gentleman, who went out one evening and nothing has been seen or heard of him since. No one knows what has become of him. It is strange, isn't it? But it is all true. His furniture is to be sold, the doorkeeper tells me; and the rooms are to be let. It is no great loss to me, however. I used to meet him occasionally on the stairs; but I never spoke to him, and I don't believe he could tell whether I was young or old, for he never even looked at me."

"What did he do?"

"He was employed in a mercantile house in the Rue du Sentier, I believe."

"He was probably sent to collect some money and made off with it."

"That's possible, though he was an honest, steady-looking young man."

"So was Chantepie, but that didn't prevent him from being a scoundrel."

"They are not unlike in appearance, and yet, I don't think my neighbour

as a thief. I made some inquiries about him of his most intimate friend, and he told me that Monsieur Marbeuf had been obliged to leave Paris suddenly on account of very urgent business."

"So you are acquainted with his friends?"

"With one of them, though I have only met him twice, once at home, and once at the theatre."

"I advise you to have nothing more to do with him. The intimate end of a runaway clerk cannot be a very desirable acquaintance."

Babiole was about to tell her uncle the service Subigny had rendered her the evening before, but this remark caused her to abstain, from fear of being scolded. "I was almost forgetting that I brought you some chocolate," she said, depositing a little package on the table. "They wanted to take it from me at the door, but I begged so hard they finally consented."

"Thanks, little one," said Uncle Auguste, affectionately. "I shall enjoy eating it very much when the doctor allows it. Just now I am dieted. He says, too, that I mustn't talk too much."

"Do you mean that I must now go away?"

"Oh, no; remain as long as you can, and talk as much as you like. I must not answer you, but I can listen to you, and that will console me. Ah, here comes the house doctor again. He wants to make eyes at you again, I suppose. He had better not carry things too far. If he does, I shall treat him as he deserves."

Bosc was, in fact, returning, in company with Number Nineteen whom he had met on the staircase. He was talking with him, and making fun of the visitors, in order to draw the strange patient's attention to them, and see if he recognised any of them.

"Good Heaven!" murmured Babiole, as soon as she perceived the patient. "I cannot be mistaken—that gentleman with the beard—"

"Ah, yes! he's the patient who has forgotten his name or won't tell it."

"Well, he's certainly Monsieur Marbeuf, my former neighbour, and though he has greatly changed, and is much thinner, I'm sure it's he."

"We'll find out. I have only to call the house doctor and ask him—"

"Oh, no. Pray don't. You said, only a moment ago, that nothing could induce you to denounce any one."

"But that wouldn't be denouncing him."

"It would be equivalent, as you think he has committed some crime and is desirous of concealing his name."

"I may be mistaken. Besides, he will be sure to recognise you."

"If he does recognise me, and speaks to me, that will be sufficient proof that he has no reason to reproach himself. In that case, I shall answer him, and remind him that we were neighbours in the Rue Lamartine. But otherwise, I shall be silent. I have no desire to injure him. It would bring us bad luck."

"You are right, child, I would much rather that you did not mix yourself up in the affair. You would perhaps be obliged to go before a commissary of police and explain matters. Besides, the man has never injured us, and I don't see why we should betray him."

Babiole did not abstain from revealing Marbeuf's name, solely because she disliked doing him an injury. She also remembered that André was his intimate friend, and she recollected the night when André had been bent on killing himself because Marbeuf had not returned. At this thought she came to the conclusion that Marbeuf must either have taken his friend's money away with him, or have induced André to engage in some compro-

missing enterprise, and have then fled, leaving him to face the storm. Still, André must have forgiven him, as only the evening before he had told Babiole that business had compelled Marbeuf to leave Paris very unexpectedly; hence Babiole was obliged to keep silent under penalty of offending André, or even injuring him. As by other arguments she had prevailed upon her uncle also, to hold his peace, there was a strong probability that Number Nineteen would remain what he was—a nameless patient, a living mystery—to the great chagrin of the physician who had undertaken to cure him—that is, unless he recognised Babiole, which was scarcely probable since he had scarcely looked at her in the Rue Lamartine.

He advanced slowly, escorted by the house doctor who was watching the young girl, and who did not fail to call Marbeuf's attention to her by a gentle nudge. Marbeuf glanced at her, and seemed pleased to look at her; he displayed neither surprise nor emotion. He was pleased to see a pretty face, and that was all. "I think you must be grateful to me for having sent for you," remarked Bosc, raising his voice, so as to be heard by Babiole and her uncle. "You were walking about there under the leafy trees, with no horizon but the walls, while the prospect here is much more agreeable."

"But not for long," replied Number Nineteen, smiling sadly.

"For twenty minutes longer, at least," replied his companion, glancing at his watch, "and later on, you can think of the persons you are now looking at. They will return next Thursday, perhaps, and if you recognise them when they arrive, that will be making some progress."

"Well, comrade, how do you feel to-day?" cried Uncle Auguste, who could hold his tongue no longer.

"About the same," was Marbeuf's gloomy reply.

"I was just relating your story to my niece, and she would not believe me."

"I can very readily understand that mademoiselle should find it difficult to believe. There are moments when I can scarcely believe it myself."

"It is so extraordinary," stammered Babiole, who was on thorns.

"So extraordinary, mademoiselle," said Bosc, delighted to have an opportunity of entering into conversation with such a pretty girl, "so extraordinary that only a few hours ago one of the students expressed to me his opinion that this worthy fellow was only fooling us, and that he could tell us his name and history if he chose."

"I only wish I could," replied Marbeuf. "I assure you I should not be vegetating here."

"Oh, you will soon be at liberty. One of these days, if other means prove ineffectual, Dr. Valbrègue will probably decide to take you with him about Paris. If I were master here, it would have been done before now. I have suggested the idea to him, and I will again."

"Thank you, sir; I firmly believe that it is the only way to cure me. The sight of some familiar object, a shop or a sign, will perhaps suffice to restore the lost thread of my recollections. And now I think of it," he added in subdued tones and turning to Bosc, "a moment ago, when I perceived mademoiselle, it seemed to me that this was not the first time I had seen her. I thought of a staircase, and a door-keeper's room, and some way connected her with them. It was absurd, of course; but the impression only lasted for a second. I was deceived, probably; mademoiselle's face is not one to be forgotten when one has once seen it. But a meeting with some other person might illumine my poor brain which

ways enshrouded in darkness. In the meantime," he continued sadly, "I must practise patience, for I am obliged to admit that all my efforts to remember only result in fatiguing me. For instance, ever since this morning, I have been constantly racking my brain, and I feel as exhausted as if I had been tramping over ploughed ground for hours. I can scarcely stand, and when the nurse called me, I was just coming up to go to bed."

"Then lie down, my friend, and try to sleep," said Bose, kindly.

"I am going to try. Excuse me, mademoiselle," said Marbeuf, politely, raising his voice.

Babiole bowed without replying. There were tears in her eyes. Marbeuf laid down; but little Bose did not allow the conversation to drop. "Mademoiselle, you have almost effected a marvellous cure," he said, smiling. "Music has charms to soothe the savage breast and beauty kindles intelligence. A little more, and your presence would have recalled our patient's memory and all the *servants* at the Academy of Medicine would be talking of you."

"I can't say that I am at all particular about that," murmured Babiole.

"Then you never saw this poor fellow before you came here?" inquired Bose.

"No, sir."

"Do you take my niece for a private inquiry agent?" growled Uncle Auguste.

"You are quick to take offence, it seems to me. It is a great mistake to let so excited. It may do you a serious injury in your present condition."

"Do you consider my uncle dangerously ill?" inquired Babiole.

"Oh, no, he is out of danger, but we must avoid a relapse. Relapses are very dangerous things, and it is for that reason I beg of him not to become excited. But some one is waiting for me, so I must bid you good-morning, mademoiselle. However, one word more, if you will permit it. May I relate Number Nineteen's history to all your acquaintances—you may be of great assistance to us in that way—and at the same time give a description of his personal appearance. You may know some one who can put us on the right track." Thereupon, raising his cap, Bose moved away.

"A fine idea, to give you a commission like that!" muttered Uncle Auguste, sullenly. "I am not at all anxious to oblige the fool, and I think it would be much better, now that he has gone away, to ask Number Nineteen if he doesn't remember you."

"No, no, not to-day," replied Babiole. "Don't you see that he is asleep?"

"Asleep—or pretending to sleep, I don't know which."

"Besides, the clock has just struck three, and I shall have to go off with the rest of the visitors. Will you promise me not to say anything to him about me until next Thursday?"

"With pleasure. I am more and more convinced that this fellow has committed some crime, and I have no desire to become any better acquainted with him."

"I shall be able to ascertain the truth between now and Thursday; and on my next visit, I will tell you what I have learned."

"Very well. I am not particularly anxious to know, however. Write to Madame Divet, resigning your position, and remain quietly at home. I will attend to all the rest; and now, as you have to go, give me a kiss."

Babiole kissed her uncle affectionately upon both cheeks, and followed the crowd of visitors after casting another glance at the sleeping Marbeuf.

She found herself at the very end of the throng, and it was useless for her to attempt to force her way through it. Nor was she in any haste; she was thinking of the two friends who had been her neighbours, though rather more of André than of Marbeuf. "I must see him," she said to herself; "but where shall I find him? I forgot to ask him for his address last evening. He promised to come and see me, but will he do so? I cannot defer telling him about what is going on here. If I only knew what bank he is employed! But now I think of it, my uncle just told me that Chantepie is cashier at Monsieur Vernelle's in the Rue Bergère—and Monsieur André said he saw Chantepie every day—so they must both be employed in the same establishment. Ah, well, I will go there and ask for him."

These thoughts darted through Babiole's mind while she was descending the stairs. She had just reached the hall below, when Bosc, who was smoking his pipe at the door of a room, recognised her and stepped forward saying, "Pray, excuse me, mademoiselle, but I should like to say another word to you about Number Nineteen. Would you believe it, I can't rid myself of the idea that the poor fellow knows you. His eyes brightened on perceiving you."

"I can't understand why."

"It is possible that you have forgotten him, but if I repeated to you what he said to me, the circumstances of your meeting might occur to you."

"I think not," murmured Babiole, still firmly resolved to remain silent.

"Still, you might repeat what he said—"

"Gladly, if you will come in."

"Where?"

"Into this guard-room here. If I should be seen talking with you on the staircase, it might occasion remark. You cannot imagine how particular they are here. I have some very interesting things to tell you."

"Thank you, sir, but—"

"Oh, you need not be afraid; you will not be alone with me. Gimbert, one of the assistant surgeons, is there, and Mother Colas, our matron, is making us some coffee. So pray come in."

Babiole hesitated. She was dying to know what Marbeuf had said upstairs, for she had seen him whispering with Bosc before he threw himself on the bed; but, on the other hand, what would these young men think of her if she accepted the invitation? Still, she was not afraid of them; and they seemed much less formidable than the old scoundrel whom she had so cleverly managed to elude on leaving the theatre. "Very well," she said, finally, "but I can only remain an instant. I am in a great hurry."

"Five minutes only, mademoiselle," exclaimed Bosc, standing aside to let her pass.

The room she entered was a square apartment, with white-washed walls. It overlooked an inner courtyard, and was very scantily furnished. A large iron bedstead, on which the house doctor on duty slept at night, a large book-case filled with old medical newspapers and note-books; a copper water-tank with a basin of the same material affixed to the wall; a long list of patients' names, with the numbers of their beds; a stove, at which an old woman in a mob-cap was preparing some coffee; and in one corner a deal table, on which a red-haired young man was leaning, while he pored over some old books. This studious personage raised his head, glanced at Babiole over his spectacles, and then resumed his reading. The old woman

made a grimace, and began to poke the ashes in the hope of reviving a nearly extinct fire.

"Mademoiselle," said Bosc, offering Babiole a cane-seated chair, "excuse me for not offering you better accommodation, but the department of public charities neglects to provide us with very luxurious seats."

"It is not necessary to apologise, sir," replied the young girl. "I haven't time to sit down, and I can listen to you very well standing. Pray tell me what that unfortunate young man said about me, with as little delay as possible?"

"He told me he thought he had met you on a staircase near a door-keeper's room. Perhaps he has visited some inmate of the house in which you live?"

"I don't think so," murmured Babiole.

"At all events, we can at least try the experiment. I shall repeat what he said to Dr. Valbrègue to-morrow, and if you will have the kindness to give me your address, our chief will bring the fellow to your house."

Whether Bosc merely wanted a pretext to call upon her, or whether he was really actuated by a desire to solve the mystery, mattered but little to Babiole. She was determined that Marbeuf should not be identified before she had informed André of her discovery. So, pretending to regard the proposal as a mere jest, she answered: "You are joking, sir. I live in too plain a way to receive a visit from a celebrated physician, so it is useless for me to give you my address."

"Why, I promise you that I will not abuse your kindness."

"I believe you, but I never give my address to anyone. That is one of my principles. Besides, such a visit would do no good whatever. The poor fellow has only dreamed this, and such an experiment would only confuse him still more."

"How quickly you decide the question, mademoiselle. Dr. Valbrègue is a most able physician, and yet all his learning and talent have availed him but little in this case. However, since you refuse to help us, I shall report the matter to him to-morrow morning, and he will then decide what it is best to do; but I warn you that he will blame me very much for having allowed you to leave."

"You would not detain me by force, I am sure?" said Babiole, approaching the door.

"No, mademoiselle, certainly not, but—"

Bosc did not finish his sentence; it was cut short by the boisterous entrance of Houssais, who pushed the door open so violently that Babiole recoiled in alarm.

"Take care, stupid!" cried Bosc.

"I wasn't aware that you had visitors," replied the intruder, staring at Babiole: "but I only wanted to say a word or two. I have just left the laboratory. What do you think that the powder, which Valbrègue gave me to analyze, contains?"

"I am not particularly anxious to know."

"But I am going to tell you, all the same. Some poorly prepared bromide, mingled with strychnine—yes, my good fellow, strychnine, four milligrammes to the powder—just enough to poison a man slowly and almost imperceptibly, but none the less surely."

"The deuce! If Valbrègue's patient doesn't change his chemist, he won't live a month."

"Nor even a fortnight."

"You had better go and see him, and advise him to stop taking his medicine at once."

"But I don't know either his name or address."

"That's a fact. Valbrègue neglected to give you any information about his patient. Well, go and see the doctor without delay. He will be very grateful to you for warning him."

"I am quite willing to do so, but the question is, where can I find him? He is never at home on Sundays."

"Still, you had better try—and if you don't find him, leave a message for him. He will get it this evening, and can then take the necessary steps to save his patient."

"It is time he did. I will also leave him the rest of the powder, so that he can have it analyzed by some of the experts of the prefecture of police. It is a very strange affair, and the druggist who prepared the prescription is likely to have an uncomfortable time of it. Still, the powders may have been tampered with, after they left his hands—"

"That is quite possible, and I advise you to be prudent. Don't speak of the matter to anyone but Valbrègue, and, above all, no gossip here in the hospital. Mademoiselle has heard what you said, but I am sure that we can rely upon her discretion."

However, mademoiselle was already gliding out of the room. "I shall ask your uncle for your address," Bosc called after her.

Babiole did not turn, but the blow told, and she said to herself: "If my uncle gives it to him, they will bring Marbeuf to the house to-morrow, and Heaven only knows what the result will be! I haven't a moment to lose in warning Monsieur André; so I must go at once to Monsieur Vernelle" to make inquiries about him."

VI.

WHILE Babiole was talking at the Necker Hospital with Louis Marbeuf, whom André Subligny had so long sought for in vain, Clémence Vernelle was weeping in the arms of her father, who did not even try to console her, for he knew everything, and had ceased to hope. After spending the night in cursing the shameless creature who had returned to Paris to dishonour his name, and asking himself what measures he should take to rid his daughter of the presence of her infamous mother, M. Vernelle had received an early call from Bertaud, who came to announce the financial disaster of the preceding day.

The interview had been a stormy one; Bertaud audaciously denying that he had purposely compromised the interests of the man to whom he owed so much—for ten years previously M. Vernelle had raised him from abject poverty. The scoundrel even had the impudence to accuse Vernelle of negligence. He denied having received any order to sell; he denied that he had operated on his own account, and that he had abused Vernelle's confidence and credit, and enriched himself at the banker's expense. In short, he denied everything, and his victim was not in a position to prove the falsity of his assertions. Towards the close of the interview, Bertaud's manner became so insolent that M. Vernelle was obliged to show him the door. However, this well-merited expulsion could not avert the banker's ruin. It was complete. Everything that he possessed, everything that the failure at Marseilles had left him, would scarcely suffice to pay his

abilities at the end of the month, and in twenty days that fatal date could be reached.

It was Sunday ; the offices were closed, and Chantepie had not made his appearance, so that Vernelle could not apprise him of the catastrophe, which was the more terrible as it had been so unexpected, for only the previous day, before the Bourse opened, Vernelle had told his cashier that he had been warned of a decline in prices, and had taken measures accordingly. Before apprising his daughter of the blow, he had resolved to leave no means untried to avert the catastrophe, and he had appealed to his friends in banking circles for the assistance which he had not refused them under similar circumstances. But people are only willing to lend money to the rich, and rumours of Vernelle's embarrassment were already rife in the financial world, so that he was merely vouchsafed some commonplace words of consolation and more or less polite refusals. The morning was spent in this way, and Clémence had to breakfast alone. André, also, had failed to make his appearance, though he was in the habit of calling every Sunday morning to receive his employer's instructions, or, at all events, if he had called, he had not dared to ask to see Clémence in her father's absence.

The poor child was in despair, though she as yet had no idea of the extent of her misfortune. One day, when she was ten years old, and loved her mother devotedly, her father came to tell her that her mother had just started on a long journey. She had not learned the sad truth until long afterward ; in fact, not until she left boarding-school, where she remained until she was seventeen years of age. Then M. Vernelle told her on this sad subject all that a young girl could hear without her modesty being shocked. "Forget her, as I have forgotten her," were the desolate father's concluding words.

And Clémence had tried hard to obey him, but she had not succeeded. Her mother's features were indelibly impressed on her memory, and though she never spoke of her for fear of reviving M. Vernelle's grief, she constantly thought of her, hoping she would some day be brought repentant to her husband's feet by the power of maternal love. Clémence indeed dreamed of reconciling her parents, and caring little about the opinion of Parisian society, she sometimes said to herself : "If I met her, I am sure I should recognize her, and I certainly could not help throwing my arms round her neck."

She had not foreseen, however, that she would again see her mother, for the first time, openly parading her shame in an opera-box. That cruel ordeal had been in store for her, however, and she had endured it courageously. She had done what it was right she should do, unhesitatingly, but not without suffering. And this cruel blow had fallen upon her just as her father had betrothed her to the man she loved. Misfortunes, it should be remembered, never come singly. M. Vernelle returned home at two o'clock in the afternoon, and told her the rest. Out of delicacy he refrained from speaking of her mother, but he explained the financial situation to her very clearly. He did not conceal from her that ruin and poverty stared them in the face, for he had resolved to devote every penny, if necessary, to the payment of his liabilities.

In this respect also, Clémence had shown no signs of weakness. Instead of complaining, she had cordially approved his plans, and declared that she was willing to make any sacrifice. A life devoid of luxury, and even fraught with privations had no terrors for her ; and her father, seeing her so brave and calm almost regained courage.

He would gladly have shortened the painful interview, but there was one point which had to be settled. On the previous evening, only a moment before the arrival of his wife, and while he was still ignorant of the final result of his speculations, Vernelle had promised his secretary his daughter's hand, and the two young people had plighted their troth under his very eyes and with his formal approbation. What was the promise worth now, however? Would André Subligny still feel inclined to keep it and marry the dowerless daughter of a woman who had sunk to the lowest depths of degradation? And even if he felt so inclined, was it not the banker's duty to acquaint him with the deplorable facts without delay and release him?

Clémence read her father's thoughts, and spared him the pain of making this announcement. "Yes," she said firmly, "we will do our duty unto the end. You will give up all your property to your creditors, and I, although I love André and shall always love him, will not marry him. I know him well enough to feel sure that our misfortunes will not change his feelings, but I won't blight his future by compelling him to share our troubles."

"I expected no less of you," replied M. Vernelle, deeply touched; "and since you are so heroic in your self-abnegation, I will call on Monsieur Subligny and tell him that this marriage is no longer to be thought of. I will, at the same time, advise him to look for another situation, and I will even assist him in procuring one. My recommendation will be of some service, and with the business talents he possesses, I am sure he will make his way in some more fortunate establishment than mine."

"And he will marry some young girl less deeply disgraced than myself," said Clémence. "I have but one favour to ask; that is, to be allowed to see him once more. I do not wish him to misunderstand the real cause of my refusal. He will think, perhaps, that I am only acting in obedience to orders from you. So I wish to tell him myself that it is entirely of my own accord that I renounce the happiness of being his wife, and even though he may insist, I shall have strength to withstand his entreaties."

"You are right, my dear girl, and I think you will certainly see him to-day. I am even a little surprised that he has not come before now, for he is sincerely devoted to me; and however quiet the life he leads may be, it seems to me impossible that the rumours which are in circulation about me should not have reached his ears. Besides," added Vernelle, after some slight hesitation, "our abrupt departure last evening must have astonished him, and he may have guessed the cause of it. I had no intention of concealing the truth from him, however, for I invited him to call on me this morning for the express purpose of acquainting him with all the facts. Perhaps he has called unknown to us. I went out very early this morning, and on my return, I quite forgot to ask my valet if any one had been here. Ring the bell, if you please."

"Pierre is going to bring you a cup of chocolate that I ordered to be prepared for you, for I feel sure that you have eaten nothing to-day." So saying, Clémence rang, and Pierre entered carrying a tray.

"Has Monsieur Subligny been here this morning?" inquired the banker.

"Yes, sir. I forgot to tell you, sir. He called while you were engaged with Monsieur Bertaud, and he said he would not intrude then."

"Did he say that he would call again?"

"Yes, sir; and in fact there is some one in the ante-room waiting to see him."

"Who is it?"

"A young woman, sir," replied the footman, dubiously.

Clémence glanced up hastily, and M. Verneille said with a frown: "You must have made a mistake, or else she has."

"Excuse me, sir, but this young person certainly wishes to see Monsieur Subligny, and upon very urgent business, so she says. I told her that he was not here just now. Then she wanted to know where he lived; but I did not venture to give her his address without your permission, so I merely told her that Monsieur Subligny might come in at any moment, and advised her to wait for him at the street-door. You rang, sir, while I was talking with her, so I left her in the ante-room; but if she hasn't gone, I will send her away at once."

"No, no," interposed Clémence, quickly. "I want to see her. Tell her that Monsieur Subligny is here, and bring her in."

Pierre bowed, and turned to leave the room.

"What a strange idea!" exclaimed the banker. "Why are you so anxious to see this young woman?"

"To find out if she isn't the same person who smiled at André at the Opéra Comique, last evening?"

"Can it be that you are jealous?" asked M. Verneille, sadly.

"And what if I am?" retorted Clémence, almost sullenly.

She was very pale, and her eyes sparkled dangerously. She was no longer a girl resigned to sacrificing her happiness to the terrible exigencies of the situation, but a woman who loved and who wished to be loved in return, entirely and without reserve.

"You no longer have any right to be jealous," replied M. Verneille.

"He will never be your husband. So he is free."

"He was not free yesterday, and I want to know if he was deceiving me."

"And you are going to insist upon an explanation with a person you don't know, and who, perhaps, is a woman of doubtful character. The idea is absurd, and I will not allow it. I must go first and see who she is."

The banker was about to rise when the door opened and Babiole appeared.

"It is she!" murmured Clémence.

Babiole had paused upon the threshold, and seemed to be contemplating a retreat, but the valet gently pushed her forward. "Come in, mademoiselle," said M. Verneille.

"Excuse me, sir," she said, in evident embarrassment, "I asked to see Monsieur Subligny. The servant assured me he was here."

"I am expecting him every moment. What do you desire of him?"

"I wish to speak with him about several things that interest him—him alone, sir. I regret having disturbed you, and I will retire—"

"Pray remain, mademoiselle," interrupted the banker. He knew Paris, and his long experience in business life had made him a clever physiognomist; so he had only to glance at this girl of sixteen to read her true character. Babiole was clad like an honest working girl, and her charming face wore an expression which was almost equivalent to a certificate of good character. Clémence, too, in her secret heart, did the girl justice, and was ashamed of her former suspicions; but she was none the less anxious to have an explanation. "Even if the matter is of grave importance, you can confide it to me," resumed M. Verneille. "M. Subligny is my secretary, and also my friend, and my daughter's presence need not prevent you from speaking."

"You are very kind, sir, but I fear it would not be right, and if you will kindly give me Monsieur Subligny's address—"

"What ! don't you know where he lives ?"

"No, sir. My acquaintance with him is very slight. I have only spoken to him three times, at the most."

"But he lived in the same house as you," murmured Clémence.

"Did he tell you so ?" exclaimed Babiolo.

"Yes, mademoiselle. He told me so last evening at the Opéra Comique where you occupied a seat near us. You saw us, I suppose ?"

"Yes, mademoiselle ; but you did not remain until the end of the performance, and I met Monsieur Subligny on leaving the theatre. It was then that I spoke to him for the third time."

"Then how does it happen that you are ignorant of his address ?"

"I did not think to ask him for it. He only told me that he was employed at a bank."

"And you quite forgot to speak to him about the important matter that brings you here ?"

This was said in a dry tone that greatly disconcerted poor Babiolo. Her eyes fell, and blushing to her very ears, she stammered : "Yesterday I did not know what I know now."

"What is it you know, pray ?"

Babiolo drew herself up haughtily. She was not inclined to answer the questions of a person who had no right to question her, and she was probably about to make a rather impertinent reply, when M. Vernelle hastily interposed. He saw the danger, and not wishing this rather singular interview to degenerate into a feminine quarrel, he gently said : "No one here, mademoiselle, has any intention of wounding you, and I am sure that you have news of an important and urgent character for Monsieur Subligny. He resides close by, but you would not find him at home, and he will certainly call here to-day. He may arrive at any moment. Won't you sit down and wait until he comes ?"

"Thank you, sir, but I should be very sorry to intrude upon you any longer. It will be quite enough for Monsieur Subligny to know that I should like to see him as soon as possible, for I am sure that he will have the kindness to call on me, especially if you will add that it is in connection with his friend, Monsieur Marbeuf, that I wish to speak to him."

"The gentleman whose rooms he shared on his arrival in Paris ?" inquired Clémence, already greatly mollified.

"Yes, mademoiselle. Monsieur Subligny only remained there twenty-four hours, but it was then that I made his acquaintance, for Monsieur Marbeuf was my neighbour."

"But he has gone away—has left Paris, I believe ?"

"I thought so ; but he is still here."

"Monsieur Subligny assured me to the contrary."

"Monsieur Subligny was mistaken. It is to tell him where his friend is, that I am so anxious to see him."

"Then pray remain, mademoiselle," exclaimed Clémence, "remain, I beg of you."

The two young girls exchanged glances, and a treaty of peace was instantly concluded. This compact was eminently satisfactory to Babiolo, who was not yet conscious of the nature of the sentiments that André had inspired in her heart ; still less, did she cherish any hope of marrying him, so without a word, she accepted the chair which M. Vernelle placed for her

between his daughter and himself. She accepted it indeed with very good grace, and now seemed to be waiting for some one to question her. "This Sunday," the banker remarked, "a holiday for all my employés, and even for Subligny, who is my secretary. But for that—" "Oh, I did not expect to find him here," interrupted Babiole; "but I thought I might ascertain his address. It was only by chance that I learned he was employed at your bank, sir; for he did not tell me your name. But my uncle who collects bills informed me that Monsieur Chantepie was your cashier—" "What! do you know Chantepie also?" inquired M. Vernelle, greatly astonished.

"I saw him years ago, when I was only a child; but I have good reason to remember him: and as Monsieur Subligny told me he was employed in the same establishment as this—this man, I looked in the directory, found out where you lived, and came here without losing a moment."

"Is the matter so very urgent then?"

"I think so. Monsieur Subligny must particularly wish to ascertain the whereabouts of his missing friend."

"His missing friend, did you say?"

"Yes, sir. On the evening of the day when Monsieur Subligny arrived in Paris, Monsieur Marbeuf did not return home. That was more than a month ago, and no one had heard anything about him since then. Our door-keeper thinks he must be dead, and his furniture is about to be sold."

"It won't be now that you have discovered the missing man. But where is this young fellow, for he must be young, as he was at school with Subligny, who is scarcely twenty-six?"

"Pardon me, sir, but I would rather not tell you where he is."

"And why?"

"Because it is a secret that does not belong to me. Monsieur Subligny will tell you, I'm sure of it; but I would rather reveal my discovery to him alone."

"As you please, mademoiselle. He will be at liberty to keep the secret, if he likes, for I shall not ask it of him. But it seems to me that you have a rather poor opinion of my cashier," added M. Vernelle, smiling. "May I ask you what he has done? Is that, also, a secret?"

"No, sir; but I did not come here to complain of Monsieur Chantepie. I have no desire to denounce him."

"I approve that, mademoiselle. Denouncing a person is cowardly when the information is given from interested motives, as is almost always the case. Still, there are times when one fulfills a duty by revealing a man's past. If I have intrusted my safe to Monsieur Chantepie's keeping, it is only because I have no reason to doubt his integrity; so you would do me a great service by enlightening me in regard to his antecedents, with which I am but slightly acquainted. I took him into my employ ten years ago, because he was recommended to me by—by a person in whom I then felt implicit confidence."

"Ten years ago he had just ruined my father!" exclaimed Babiole, carried away by a feeling of indignation.

"What is that you say?"

"It is only the truth, sir. My father had made a modest fortune in business. He was foolish enough to intrust it to this Chantepie, who promised to make it yield a handsome profit at the Bourse."

"He may have been in perfect good faith when he advised your father. The cleverest and the best-meaning people are sometimes deceived."

"My father had proofs that his orders were not executed, and that the money he lost enriched Monsieur Chantepie; but, unfortunately, the proofs, although perfectly satisfactory to him, would not have been admitted in a court of justice, so he brought no action. He preferred to die."

"What!" exclaimed Clémence, "is it possible that he—"

"Yes, mademoiselle, and my mother died of grief. I am an orphan, and I earn my living by working in a millinery shop."

Mademoiselle Vernelle, moved to tears, stretched out her hand to Babiole, who dared not take it. M. Vernelle, recollecting the disaster which had just befallen him by reason of Bertrand's treachery, began to assure himself if the broker had not conspired with Chantepie to defraud him. But he deemed it his duty to keep his suspicions to himself, so he endeavoured to change the subject. "I feel very faint," he remarked abruptly. "Permit me to drink this chocolate, mademoiselle; but first give me my powder, Clémence."

"You forget that Dr. Valbrègue ordered you to stop taking the bromide, yesterday."

"Until to-morrow," he said, and it is now to-morrow; if he had desired a further delay, he would have let me know, so give me my usual allowance."

Clémence thereupon handed her father a powder—she was in the habit of keeping some constantly in her pocket—and the banker was about to empty it into a glass of water which the valet had brought in with the chocolate, when Babiole exclaimed: "Stop, sir!"

M. Vernelle turned and looked at her as if asking himself if she were not going mad. She had suddenly turned pale, and had half risen from her chair, at the same time making a gesture as if she wished to catch hold of his arm. "What is the matter with you, mademoiselle?" asked the banker, in astonishment.

"That powder!" murmured the young girl.

"That powder is a remedy prescribed by my physician."

"And your physician's name is Valbrègue, is it not?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; and the medicine is bromide."

"It is poison!" exclaimed Babiole.

"Poison! Do you think my daughter would poison me?"

"No, certainly not; but I am sure of what I say, and I beseech you not to take this drug."

Clémence said nothing, but she snatched the powder from her father's hands. "Explain yourself, mademoiselle, if you please," said the banker.

"How can you know all this?"

"Didn't your physician announce his intention of having this medicine analyzed?"

"Yes, and he took away one of the powders for that purpose, but—"

"And doesn't this doctor have charge of one of the hospitals?"

"Of the Necker Hospital, yes."

"Then you are certainly the person they were talking about, just now."

"Where?"

"At the hospital. I have just come from there. How fortunate that Monsieur Subigny did not tell me where he lived yesterday."

"Why do you consider it so fortunate?"

"Because, if I had known his address, I should have gone straight to his house to tell him about the friend I just saw—"

"At the hospital? And was it there that I was the subject of conversation? I assure you, mademoiselle, that I haven't the slightest idea of what you mean. Will you kindly explain yourself more clearly? You are congratulating yourself, if I am not mistaken, upon having warned me that his powder contains a poisonous ingredient."

"I congratulate myself upon having arrived here in time to save your life."

"And I am very grateful to you for having saved me, if I really was in danger. But, on the other hand, you have given me to understand that you came here for the sole purpose of meeting my secretary, and that if you had not been so anxious to see him you would have allowed me to be poisoned. In that case I am indebted for my preservation to Subigny. What am I to believe?"

"If you will kindly listen to me, sir, you will see that I have no cause for self-reproach. I had just spent two hours by the bedside of my uncle, who is a patient in the Saint Ferdinand ward of the hospital. I was about to leave when I was stopped by one of the medical men. While we were talking about my uncle's attack of bronchitis, another medical man, a chemist, came up, and told his comrade that Dr. Valbrègue—I recollect the name—had instructed him that morning to analyse a bromide powder, which he had prescribed for one of his patients, but which did not seem to agree with him. The chemist added that he had analysed it, and satisfied himself that the powder contained strychnine."

"Strychnine!"

"Yes, strychnine, which must be a most violent poison, for the other young man remarked: 'If Valbrègue's patient continues to follow this treatment, he hasn't much longer to live.'"

"And these gentlemen allowed the matter to drop there? Why didn't they send to inform me of all this?"

"Your physician hadn't told them your name, and as I knew no more about the matter than they did, I could not come here and tell you. One of them started off in search of Dr. Valbrègue, however, but he had very little hope of finding him. You see, sir, that I have good reason to feel glad that I didn't know Monsieur Subigny's address."

The father and daughter exchanged glances. "We shall never forget what you have done, mademoiselle," said M. Vernelle, with emotion. "If we can be of service to you in any way, do not hesitate to make use of us."

"I need nothing—I only want to see Monsieur Subigny," Babiole quietly replied.

"You will see him very soon. He cannot delay much longer; and if he doesn't come, I will find him and send him to you."

"He will come here, I am almost sure," murmured Clémence.

"So I have an enemy who desires my life," said the banker, talking to himself, "for there can be no mistake. But who can the scoundrel be?"

"This powder was prepared by a chemist that Monsieur Chantepie recommended to you," interrupted Mademoiselle Vernelle. "It was Monsieur Chantepie who received the last package sent, and it was he who gave the powders to your valet."

"Chantepie!—he—no, that is impossible!"

"The man who was the cause of my father's death is capable of any crime," exclaimed Babiole.

Just then, Pierre entered the room, and whispered a few words to his master. Pierre was an intelligent and discreet servant, and had gained a

tolerably correct idea of the situation. Nothing would, therefore, have induced him to usher André Subligny into the room without first consulting M. Vernelle. The banker instantly rose up. Babiole did the same, but he made her reseal herself, and said to her, in a really affectionate tone: "Mademoiselle, both my daughter and myself beg you to remain a little while longer. I must leave you to see some one; but I hope to find you here on my return. You will not regret having waited for me, I assure you, and Clémence will keep you company."

Mademoiselle Vernelle assented, and held out her hand to Babiole, who this time did not refuse hers. The banker thanked Clémence with a glance, and went out, leaving the two girls alone together. He now knew that they were kindly disposed towards each other; and he was anxious to have an explanation with André, who was awaiting him in his office. "Thank you for having come, my friend," he said to him, on entering. "I see by your face that you have heard the bad news. You don't desert me in adversity. That is kind, very kind of you."

"Desert you!" exclaimed Subligny. "Ah, sir, I hope that you did not think me capable of such baseness."

"No, my friend, but I was anxious to see you. I have so many things to tell you! I will begin with a subject that interests you exclusively, for I am not acquainted with the young man—the one whose hospitality you accepted on your arrival in Paris—Monsieur Marbeuf, I believe."

"Yes, sir. Well, what of him?"

"He has been found."

André turned pale. Anything in any way connected with the unfortunate matter of the bank-notes always disturbed him, and the thought that Marbeuf had perhaps revealed everything to M. Vernelle, filled him with alarm. "Are you not pleased to learn that he is still in Paris?" inquired the banker.

"Certainly, sir. I shall be glad to see him again. But the news was so unexpected that it quite took away my breath. If you will have the goodness to tell me where he is—"

"I cannot do that, but there is a person here who can."

"Who?"

"You will see her in a moment; but first let us speak of my own situation, and of yours. I may as well tell you at once, that I am utterly ruined."

"I have been aware of that since last night. After you left the theatre, I met Monsieur Bertaud in the public lounge, and he told me that your order to sell out had not been executed. He even had the audacity to assure me that he had not received any such instructions from you. I won't conceal from you, sir, that I treated him as he deserved to be treated, for I am sure that he was lying. He is a treacherous scoundrel. I have proofs of that, for yesterday afternoon I received through the telephone a message that was not intended for you—a message in which he announced that he had just returned from the Bourse, where he had made a large amount of money."

"This announcement was intended for my cashier, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. You may recollect that I mentioned this incident last evening at the theatre; but I attached very little importance to it, as I did not know that Bertaud had left you out of the operation."

"I had a long talk with him this morning, my dear André, and I am of your opinion that he betrayed my confidence; still I cannot prove that he acted with fraudulent intent. So it is useless to make any charge against

him ; and I can only submit to the consequences of a mistake which was undoubtedly intentional. I hope and believe that I shall be able to meet all my obligations, but I can no longer carry on business. Indeed I shall deem myself fortunate if my daughter and myself have anything left to live upon, when all my debts are paid."

"You will rise again, sir. I will work diligently—"

"Don't confound your situation with mine, my dear fellow. You are not involved in the misfortune that has overtaken me. You will lose a modest position by it, but I will assist you in finding a better one."

"What do you say, sir? Can you suppose that I would leave you? Am I not a member of your family?"

"You were to become my son-in-law, but you cannot marry Clémence now, for she has nothing left her. She understands that as well as I do, and she has requested me to release you from your engagement."

"I refuse to be released, and I ask you, in pity, to grant me an interview with Mademoiselle Vernelle, in order that I may tell her, in your presence, that my wishes have not changed. If I dared, I would add that the only thing that could console me for the disaster which has swept away your fortune, is that no one will now dare to accuse me of having married from mercenary motives."

"Your words do you honour, my dear André, and show me that I judged you rightly. You are the most honourable of men ; but I cannot accept such a sacrifice on your part, nor can my daughter either."

"Then she does not love me ! If she did, she would not hesitate. Do I?"

"You are mistaken, my dear fellow ; her heart hasn't changed ; and if my ruin was the only obstacle, I should perhaps advise her to marry you, as you are generous enough not to accept release. But you do not know everything. You do not know her mother."

"I saw her last evening at the theatre. A certain person took care to point her out to me."

Vernelle started. "Then you know why I left so abruptly," he said, in an unsteady voice, "and you can understand what Clémence must have suffered."

"I know all," replied André. "Monsieur Bertaud told me."

"He ! I might have known it. It wasn't enough for him to ruin me then ? He must needs drag my name through the mire, for what he told you he will tell to others. I must be the laughing-stock of all Paris by this time. Ah ! if I had only myself to think of, I would kill that woman and her lovers. But I must remember my daughter. What would become of her ? We have but one resource left ; that is to exile ourselves, and hide our shame in some distant part of the world."

"If you exile yourselves, I shall go with you. But why should you leave France ? It is for that woman to go."

"You don't know her ! She no doubt returned here expressly to defy me. I sometimes think that she likes to cause us all the suffering she can."

"She must be a monster, then,"

"No, not a monster. She seems to have no idea of the atrocity of her acts. She commits crimes just as a pear-tree produces pears, and never feels the slightest twinge of remorse. You don't know the history of my marriage."

"Until yesterday I was not aware that you had a wife. My father, who so often spoke of you, always led me to suppose that you were a widower."

"I am grateful to him for his delicacy, especially as no one was better acquainted than himself with the melancholy history of my married life. He was a great friend of my wife's family before I married her, and afterwards he lived on the most intimate terms with us. When the scandal occurred, about ten years ago, he was living in Havre, but he always paid us a visit when he came to Paris."

"I was then at college."

"Yes, and he never brought you to see us, though I often begged him to do so. I have since thought, that he was perhaps aware of what was going on in my household, and that he did not wish to introduce his son to a woman who was so basely deceiving me."

"He never spoke of her to my mother. Had he done so, she would probably have given me some intimation of the truth, when she handed me the letter recommending me to you."

"It was kind of him not to tell an honest woman of my disgrace. But I must finish my story. My wife was an orphan; she had just left the convent, when I met her; she was rich, and her parents were of noble birth. Her name was Yolande de Bacqueville."

"An old Norman name."

"Yes, her ancestors were knights in the days of William the Conqueror. Mine tilled the soil; my grandfather sold handkerchiefs at fairs, and my father kept a country inn. I was just beginning to accumulate a fortune, and I felt greatly honoured that her guardian, an old and impoverished nobleman, should condescend to grant me her hand. I had met her at Dieppe, and had fallen desperately in love with her. I would gladly have married her, even if she had been poor. As it was, I insisted that she should marry under the separate property system, and the three hundred thousand francs she possessed have never been invested in my business. She always had the entire disposal of the money, and it was still in her possession when she left me. The first years of our married life were happy ones. I worked untiringly. I wanted to make her the wife of a millionaire, and I seemed to be in a fair way to accomplish my purpose. We went but little into society, though she was very fond of it. We only entertained a few friends—your father was one of the number—and yet this retired life seemed to satisfy my wife. But there was latent fire in her nature. Clémence was born—and would you believe it?—her mother's misconduct began only a year afterwards. I, alone, was ignorant of the truth. My friends ceased visiting the house. Your father's visits to Paris became more and more rare. Time went on. I was still blind to the truth, when one day Yolande eloped with a fashionable tenor. She had gone out one morning, as usual. I expected her home and waited dinner for her, but she did not return. She had taken the train for Saint Petersburg, together with one hundred thousand francs which Chantepie had given her out of my safe, in compliance with her request."

"What! was Chantepie with you then?"

"Yes; he had been in my employ about six months. It was she who first recommended him to me. I understand your suspicions, and I will speak further of this man by-and-bye; but first allow me to finish this lamentable confession. I had strength to bear the blow, and I did everything in my power to spare Clémence all possible suffering. It was a terrible blow to her, for the poor child was very fond of her mother, and indeed she has never forgotten her. It was she who first recognised her, last night at the theatre. I told her all I could tell a child of that age.

Then I sent word to that degraded creature that I would leave her in possession of her dowry and the money she had stolen from me, and not prosecute her upon one condition—that she would never set foot in France again.”

“And she accepted the terms?”

“Yes, I have a letter she wrote me from Russia, in which she acceded to my proposals, but in which she never even inquired after her daughter. I afterwards learned that she had soon squandered her fortune, and that she had become a mere adventuress. For several years past she has had an intrigue with a Russian prince, whom she deceives in the most brazen manner.”

“One of the men who accompanied her last evening?”

“Probably. However she has broken her compact, and has come to Paris to torment and humiliate me. Either she or I must leave.”

“She is the one to leave,” exclaimed Subligny.

“But who can drive her away?” asked M. Vernelle sadly. “You certainly cannot think of it, my dear André; and now that you know all, I beg of you to calmly consider what a future would await you if you married Clémence. She is my daughter, but she is also the daughter of that shameless creature.”

“What do her mother’s sins matter to me?”

“Would you have the courage to expose yourself and to expose your wife to the humiliation of again meeting the infamous creature who paraded her shame so unblushingly yesterday?”

“I swear to you that I will save Mademoiselle Vernelle from any such humiliation in future. So I trust she will not refuse to marry me.”

“What! Your resolve to marry Clémence hasn’t been weakened by the revelations that have just been made to you?”

“On the contrary, they have only strengthened it. If you will have the kindness to take me to Mademoiselle Vernelle, I will implore her to name the day for our marriage. It shall take place in a week from now, if she will consent. I merely desire time to procure an affidavit of my father’s death, and my mother’s written consent. You will not refuse yours—”

“You forget that—the consent of—this woman—is also indispensable. Will you go and ask her for it?”

“What! Mademoiselle Vernelle cannot marry without the consent of her mother who certainly lost all authority over her when she deserted her?”

“No, my friend. The law is explicit. My wife has a perfect right to oppose her daughter’s marriage, and if she refuses her consent, Clémence will be obliged to send her what is called a respectful summons. Would you advise her to submit to this humiliation?”

André hung his head; but he was not convinced, and his hesitation lasted only a moment. “I will obtain her mother’s consent myself,” he said firmly.

“How will you do it?”

“What difference does that make to you, provided I succeed? I suppose you have no fear of my resorting to unworthy means, and that you will give me *carte-blanche* in the matter?”

“Yes, but Clémence—”

“She knows nothing about the law, so it is not worth while to consult her.”

“Not upon this point, perhaps; but it will be necessary to induce her

to revoke her decision respecting the marriage. She had relinquished all hope of it. She told me so not an hour ago."

"Because she was in error respecting my feelings. But, when you tell her that I know all, and that I love her more than ever, she will not drive me to despair by a refusal."

"Why don't you tell her all this yourself?"

"I am ready to do so. When will you allow me to see her?"

"In another moment, if you like. I left her in the drawing-room."

"Does she know I am here?"

"She probably suspects it; and the time is not unfavourable. You will find her greatly agitated though by the danger I have just escaped."

"That you have just escaped!" exclaimed Subligny, in great astonishment.

"Yes, I have but narrowly escaped being poisoned. The medicine I have been taking, had already affected me considerably, and another dose might have killed me. You doubtless recollect that my physician, astonished at the effect the bromide had upon me, took a powder away with him, in order to have it analysed. Well, it seems that the medicine contained strychnine."

"Poison! that is terrible! Who could have mixed it with your bromide?"

"That is what I have been vainly asking myself. I have my suspicions, but, until I am certain, I shall be silent for fear of accusing an innocent person. Dr. Valbrègue can, perhaps, assist me in discovering the culprit. But, to return to your affairs, my dear André. Do you really wish to see my daughter?"

"I implore you to take me to her at once."

"She is not alone, however."

"Ah! I was not aware of that," stammered Subligny, somewhat disconcerted.

"A young girl whom you know, and who knows you—who seems to take a deep interest in you, in fact—is with her. She lives in the house where you stayed on your arrival in Paris. Having been a neighbour of yours, and, being very anxious to see you, she came here in search of you."

André fell from the clouds. What could Babiole want? How had she managed to discover M. Vernelle's name and address? While escorting her home, the night before, André had taken good care not to tell her his employer's name, or where he lived, for he was a little afraid of her. Some words which had escaped her, made him suspect that she was jealous of Clémence, so he was anxious to prevent the two girls from finding themselves again face to face. Accordingly, he now asked himself, with no little trepidation, what could be the object of Babiole's unexpected visit.

"You seem annoyed to learn that this young woman is here," remarked M. Vernelle.

"I am greatly astonished," replied the young secretary, "and I cannot imagine what she has to say to me. I know her so slightly."

"She has come to tell you that she has discovered your friend, Monsieur Marbeuf. He is in Paris. She has seen him, and wishes to apprise you of the fact. She did not know where you lived, but hoped to find you here; and it is very fortunate that she came, for it was she who prevented me from poisoning myself. She had just heard at the Necker Hospital that the powders I was taking contained strychnine. Consequently, we

we her no little gratitude, and my daughter could not let her go away, though she treated her rather coldly at first. Between ourselves, my dear André, you were the cause of it, for the girl is very pretty, and Clémence is a little inclined to be jealous. But the clouds soon cleared away, and the pair are now the best friends in the world."

André breathed freely once more, although he was not greatly enlightened by the explanation. He felt that it would be best to settle the matter then and there. To hesitate about seeing Clémence in Babiole's presence, would be equivalent to confessing that there was a secret between the little milliner and himself. So André resolved to burn his ships behind him; that is to say, to speak to his betrothed exactly as if Babiole were not within hearing. Having never committed himself in any way with the young milliner, he had nothing to conceal from her; and, if she cherished any hope of winning his affections, it was time to dispel the illusion. "Very well, sir," he said, turning to the banker, "as you seem to think that my former neighbour can be present, without any impropriety, at the interview which you kindly grant me with Mademoiselle Vernelle, I beg of you not to defer it." "You are quite right, my friend," replied the banker. "Come." And, taking André's arm, he led him into the drawing-room.

The two girls were chatting familiarly. Their friendship, indeed, seemed to be making rapid progress. Babiole blushed a little on perceiving André, but she did not appear embarrassed, and her manner completely reassured Mademoiselle Vernelle, who was furtively watching her. The most uncomfortable of the three was certainly Subigny; not that he hesitated for an instant about making his declaration, but he recollected, a little too late, that Babiole might, with a single word, place him in a position of terrible embarrassment. As she had found Marbeuf, she might know all about the story of the bank-notes, and any allusion to this matter might prompt questions from M. Vernelle, which he, Subigny, could not answer truthfully. He therefore resolved to try and avert the danger by questioning Babiole at once. "Mademoiselle," he said to her, after greeting Clémence affectionately, "I hear that you have met my friend, Marbeuf, and I shall be very happy to talk with you about the worthy fellow, who, I fear, has made a great mistake in leaving his employers. But these matters will not interest Monsieur Vernelle; and I will call in the Rue Lamartine this evening. Marbeuf will probably be there by that time, if he isn't there already."

"I was going to ask you to come," replied Babiole, unhesitatingly. "Monsieur Marbeuf needs your assistance: but it is useless to discuss his misfortunes before this gentleman and his daughter. I have, therefore, refrained from speaking to them on the subject: but I was extremely anxious to inform you of the state of affairs. Indeed, that is the only reason why I ventured to come here."

"She understands me, Heaven be praised!" thought André.

"But you will come again, I sincerely hope," said Clémence to Babiole. "I am already deeply indebted to you; and I should be very glad to have you regard me as a friend."

Babiole thanked her, but with some reserve; and Subigny, reassured as regards any imprudent revelations on the pretty milliner's part, decided to broach the question of his marriage. "Mademoiselle," said he, addressing Clémence, "your father has kindly given me permission to ask you to appoint the day for our wedding."

"Our marriage!" murmured Mademoiselle Vernelle. "Hasn't my father told you?"

"He has told me everything, mademoiselle; but my feelings have undergone no change. This is the fourteenth of March. If you are willing, we can be married before the end of the month. I entreat you to name an early day."

Clémence could not summon up courage to utter a refusal or an assent; but she gave André her hand, which he kissed ardently, yet respectfully. M. Vernelle was weeping. Babiolo had become grave. It was evident that she had not been prepared for this scene, and that it made her feel anything but comfortable. She was already preparing to leave, but as she did so, André walked straight to M. Vernelle, who opened his arms and who pressed him to his heart, saying: "My son."

"Trust me, sir," said Subligny warmly. "In less than three days the obstacles you mentioned to me will have ceased to exist."

Clémence rose in her turn. She had understood him, for she said in a voice that trembled with emotion: "André, I belong to you, and I intrust my father's honour to your keeping. I will do my best to defeat the efforts of the persons who are trying to poison him—though who they are I cannot tell. Do not lose a moment in attending to the matter you have just spoken of; still, you must remember your friend who needs your assistance. Go to see him at once with mademoiselle, to whom we are all deeply indebted."

André had not dared to hope for such a brilliant success; but he was none the less anxious to profit by it. M. Vernelle, also, gave him an encouraging look. "Will you permit me to dispose of to-morrow as I see fit?" Subligny inquired. "I will endeavour to make good use of my time."

"A much better use of it than in my office," replied the banker, sadly. "My business career is virtually ended; and I have no further need of a secretary, my dear André. But I rely upon seeing you to-morrow. You will dine with us, I trust; and I ardently hope you will bring us good news. I wish this more than I expect it."

Babiolo seemed to have been suddenly changed into a statue. She allowed Mademoiselle Vernelle to kiss her upon both cheeks, then made a deep courtesy to M. Vernelle, and left the room without casting a single glance behind her. André followed her; and the valet stared at them with mute astonishment as they passed out, escorted to the door by his master.

In point of fact, the idea of their going off together, under the banker's protection, was a great surprise to Pierre, and upset all his notions of propriety.

Neither André nor Babiolo spoke while they went down the stairs, but just as they reached the street the young milliner exclaimed: "I was not aware that you expected to marry your employer's daughter, though I ought to have known it by the way you were looking at her last night. Rich young ladies are very fortunate. They can marry to please themselves. I shall never marry."

"Why not?" replied Subligny. "When Mademoiselle Vernelle is my wife, we will find a nice husband for you, and—"

But he saw that Babiolo was not listening to him. In fact, she was looking at two men standing near the corner of the Rue Rougemont. "It is he!" she murmured, laying her hand on André's arm. "It is that hateful Chantepie. He has seen us, and is coming towards us. I don't inter-

wait for him, for I should certainly tear his eyes out if he said a word to me. I shall be at home all day to-morrow, so call at whatever hour you like, and I will tell you where Monsieur Marbeuf is." Thereupon, without giving Subigny any time to protest, Babiole ran lightly down the street, and in another minute was out of sight.

Meanwhile Chantepie came forward, having left his companion, a shabbily dressed young fellow, at the street corner. André had no more desire than Babiole to enter into conversation with the cashier; but it was too late to avoid him. "Good morning, my dear fellow," cried Chantepie. "That was a very pretty girl. Why did she run away as soon as she saw me? Wasn't it the same girl I met in your friend Marbeuf's room the day I first made your acquaintance? She ran away that morning too. She seems to be afraid of me. You show very good taste in your selections; but you do very wrong to make an appointment at your employer's door, for if his daughter should see you, it would not improve your prospects."

"You are very much mistaken in regard to the young lady who was with me," said Subigny, angrily.

"Calm yourself, my dear fellow. I have no right to meddle with your love affairs, I know; but a few words of good advice are never amiss. Let us change the subject. You know that Vernelle is ruined, I suppose?"

"Yes; and I also know that he has been basely defrauded by Bertaud?"

"Defrauded! The dence! you are putting it pretty strong; and if Bertaud heard you—"

"I am ready to repeat to him what I just said to you."

"I don't deny it. But what are you going to do? The house will go to pieces, and I shan't remain in it. Vernelle won't need a cashier when his safe is empty, as will soon be the case. I can easily obtain a position elsewhere; but what will become of you?"

"What business is it of yours what becomes of me?"

"You seem to be offended with me. Why, I should like to know? Because I lent you a hundred thousand francs to keep you from blowing your brains out—a hundred thousand francs to replace the money your friend Marbeuf took away with him to foreign parts? In that case, you would do as well to repay the loan before insulting me."

André had a startling response upon his lips. He was strongly tempted to reply: "Marbeuf is found; Marbeuf is in Paris, and will vindicate himself," but he paused in time, remembering that it was not advisable for him to say this until he had seen his friend. However, Chantepie had gone too far, and the young secretary resolved to break off all connection with him then and there. "Sir, this is the second time that you have taunted me with my indebtedness to you," he said, drawing himself up haughtily. "You forced the service, to which you allude, upon me. I will pay you legal interest on the amount as long as I live, and at my death the loan will be repaid by an insurance company; but I cannot allow you to give me instructions and orders in regard to matters that don't in the least concern you. I even request you not to speak to me again; and if this language displeases you, I am ready to fight with you whenever you like."

"Thanks; you might kill me, or I might kill you, and in either case, I should lose my money, for insurance companies don't pay the policies of people who are killed in duels or who commit suicide. So I sha'n't fight with you, and I hope that you have given up all idea of blowing your brains out, for your happiness is now virtually assured. Mademoiselle Vernelle loves you, and will marry you whenever you like."

"I forbid your mentioning that young lady's name."

"Of course I could prevent this marriage," continued Chantepie, without paying the slightest attention to his companion's remarks. "If I see Vernelle or his daughter the letter you were writing just as I arrived save you--the letter in which you confess having stolen--"

"My letter to Marbeuf?"

"Yes, it is explicit enough; I have preserved it among my papers, together with your receipt, which is also sufficiently plain. 'I hereby acknowledge that Monsieur Chantepie has paid into Monsieur Vernelle's safe, in my stead, the sum of one hundred thousand francs, due from me to the said safe,'--that's how the receipt runs, if my memory serves me right. What do you think would be the result if I exhibited those documents?"

André remained silent. He realized that he was at this man's mercy and he nearly choked with rage.

"But you need have no fear, my dear fellow," continued Chantepie. "I shan't make use of them, and I wouldn't injure you for the world. I am a little rough, sometimes, for I haven't had the same training as you, but I liked you from the very first, and when you learn to know me better you will regret having so misjudged me. You imagine, I'm sure, that if I am anxious for you to marry Mademoiselle Vernelle, it is solely because I want to have my money back. But I will convince you to the contrary. Mademoiselle Vernelle won't have any dowry, and her father will leave her nothing. Handsome and well-mannered as you are, you might marry a very wealthy heiress. Still, I urge you more strongly than ever to marry Mademoiselle Vernelle. Why? Because I know that you love her, and that she will make you perfectly happy. This is certainly disinterested advice. Not that I renounce all hope of being repaid some day, by any means. I have great hopes of your future. I feel sure that you will make a fortune, so I need not depend upon your bride's dowry for payment."

This was said with a kindly frankness which somewhat modified André's convictions. It might be, after all, that the cashier was a sort of subtle benefactor, and that Babiole erred in her estimate of him. "Shall I give you another proof of my good faith?" continued Chantepie. "I told you yesterday that Madame Vernelle had turned out badly. Still, she has not. Mademoiselle Clémence's mother, and you cannot marry without her consent. Now I know that she has just arrived in Paris, which is very unfortunate for her husband, as well as for you; as she is quite capable of refusing her consent if only to infuriate poor Vernelle, and cause a scandal which you would no doubt prefer to avoid. Well, that being the case, would you like her to grant you permission to marry her daughter, and then would you like her to return to the country whence she came--namely, Muscovy?"

"Are you acquainted with her?" exclaimed Subligny.

"I have known her for at least twenty years. It was she who secured me my situation at Vernelle's."

"I know it. He told me so."

"Ah!" said Chantepie, evidently somewhat disconcerted. Then quickly recovering himself, he added: "Oh, yes, Vernelle saw her last night at the Opéra Comique. Bertaud told me so. It seems, by the way, that you have treated poor Bertaud rather shabbily, but that is no concern of mine. I now understand how Vernelle came to tell you about his wife. He was compelled to explain why he had run away as soon as he saw her. However, he couldn't have told you his wife's present situation, since

"I'm acquainted with it. I'm acquainted with it, however, and it would be well for you to know something about it, unless you have abandoned the idea of marrying—"

"Mademoiselle Vernelle will be my wife before the end of the month."

"I congratulate you most heartily, my dear fellow. It is a decision that does you honour, and I assure you that you won't regret it," said Chantepie, warmly. "I am so delighted that I will overlook anything—your gracious greeting, your proposal to fight, or your indebtedness. You can pay me whenever it suits your convenience. I am in no hurry; and if I can do anything to facilitate your marriage, it will afford me the greatest pleasure imaginable. The main thing is to obtain Madame Vernelle's consent. At the present time she is living with Prince Lipetsk, who has had enough of her. He regards her very much as a galley-slave regards his ball and chain, and is only waiting for an opportunity to get rid of her. If he does abandon her, matters will be even worse, for she will sink still lower, and mark this, he will abandon her instantly, if he discovers that she is a married woman."

"Is it possible that he is still ignorant of that fact?"

"Quite so. She has made him believe that she is the widow of some country gentleman in Normandy. Now, as the prince would cast her off without remorse if he knew the truth, you need only threaten her with exposure to gain her consent to your marriage. You might also hint that Vernelle means to prosecute her. That would be decisive. If I were in your place, I would go and see her. She occupies a charming furnished house, No. 47 Rue Galilée, and is known as the Baroness d'Orbec. If you go at once you will be sure to find her at home; she always returns from her afternoon drive at about five o'clock, and does not dine until eight. If I were in your place, as I said before, I would go and see her, and lay down my conditions."

"What conditions?"

"I should first demand her consent to her daughter's marriage—her written consent—couched in legal terms. She won't hesitate to give it if you threaten her properly. Afterwards I should extort from her a promise to leave Paris immediately. That will be a more difficult task, for the prince wishes to spend the winter here, but he will cheerfully allow her to go to Nice or Monaco alone; and in that case, you will be well rid of her, at least until the spring. But you have no time to lose, for Vernelle is dying, and this new trouble won't do him any good. He may die any day, and when he is dead you will have no means of action against Yolande."

André started as he thought of the attempt to poison Vernelle, but he could no longer suspect Chantepie, who proposed a plan of action dependent upon the banker's existence, and he asked himself if he should follow his bold but sensible advice. If the cashier told the truth as regards Madame Vernelle, the scheme might prove successful; and besides, the banker had just given him full permission to do anything he might deem expedient to gain his wife's consent. "Go, my dear fellow," urged the cashier; "go at once. Tell her plainly that you come on behalf of her husband, but don't tell her that the marriage is decided upon. Above all, don't tell her whom Mademoiselle Vernelle is to marry, and don't introduce yourself under your real name. It is important that she shouldn't know that you are the son of Monsieur Charles Subligny, with whom she is so well acquainted in former years."

"I am not at all anxious to give my name, I am sure," muttered André,

"But you are anxious to marry Mademoiselle Clémence, and you are right. I have pointed out to you the only means of overcoming the obstacle in your path. Resort to it, and without delay. You will be married before the end of the month, and you will afterwards find that Jules Chantepie is not as bad as he seems to be. Now I must step in and see our employer, and tender him my resignation. By-bye, my dear fellow, and good luck to you in the Rue Galilée!" Thereupon Chantepie turned and entered the banker's house, leaving André greatly perplexed.

"What am I to believe and do?" muttered the young cashier. "Am I mistaken as regards this man? Perhaps so. But why is he so anxious for me to marry Clémence?"

VII.

At five o'clock on a March afternoon, providing the weather be fine, the Champs Elysées wear a festive air. Carriages and riders are returning from the Bois de Boulogne, and the main avenue is crowded with horses and vehicles. The walks are thronged with promenaders, and the setting sun gilds the budding leaves of the more forward trees. Even the rich hail the return of spring with pleasure, and yet for them there is no dreary season. In winter they betake themselves to the land of orange-groves; in summer they go to the sea-side, where the breeze brings them health and exhilaration; in autumn, they shoot and hunt, and enjoy the pleasures of country life. But the poor, who vegetate from one year's end to another—peasants, slaves of toil, whom necessity chains to offices and workrooms, the petty shop-keepers, whom business keeps indoors day after day—all greet with still greater delight the return of spring.

In years gone by, they were wont to inhale the fresh air of the suburbs, but now-a-days the lilacs at Romainville are cut down, and the wood, so dear to the heart of Paul de Kock, exists only in memory. Those who are partial to tippling still frequent the suburban taverns, where wine is less dear; but the more aspiring roam about Paris evincing a marked preference for the fashionable districts. They make the circuit of the lakes in the Bois de Boulogne on foot, and eagerly take possession of every available seat to watch the procession of carriages pass by; for when one is not rich enough of self, to gaze at the wealthy is a diversion that makes one forget, at least for a while, the cares and troubles of daily life. The looker-on reflects that he himself will perhaps some day become wealthy, and the hope consoles him for his trials.

It is for the same reason that work-girls are so fond of reading romances in which a pretty washer-woman marries a millionaire prince. They do not believe that it ever really happened, but in their secret hearts they think that it might happen, and so they await the coming of their prince. Sometimes he presents himself in the guise of a well-to-do cattle-dealer, but what does that matter, providing the dream comes true?

Babiole was not one of this class, however. She was a sensible, conscientious girl, who did not read novels, because she lacked the time to do so, and who never complained of her lot. A true philosopher, though in the least conscious of the fact, she took life as she found it, without guiling herself with illusions, or cherishing any chimerical hopes; and even at the age of sixteen, she reasoned much more sensibly than many of

young ladies educated at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, and did not aspire to marry a man of a superior social position to her own. Still, her youthful candour did not mar her powers of discernment, or prevent her from discriminating between the different young men she met; and André Subligny was the only person who had really pleased her, and who suited her in certain respects. By birth and education he belonged to a superior class, but he had no fortune: so his poverty atoned for his origin. If she had thought of him, it was because she had at first supposed that he could marry her without lowering himself; but she no longer thought so, now that chance had made her a witness of his betrothal to Clémence. Babiole was so sensible and conscientious to dispute with Mademoiselle Vernelle for André's heart, but she found that the sacrifice would cost her much more than she had at first supposed. She had certainly done nothing to win Subligny's love, but now that he could not love her without breaking the vows he had plighted to another, she regretted him. This feeling, for which she blushed as if it had been a crime, was so keen that, on leaving the banker's house, she had gladly availed herself of the first opportunity to leave André; for she was afraid that she might betray her disappointment. "To-morrow, when he comes to see me," she thought, "I shall be calmer—I shall have had time to reflect and to come to my senses."

The poor child had other troubles as well. She had decided not to return to her employer's shop on the Boulevard Magenta, for since her adventure at the Opéra Comique, she had taken a strong dislike to Madame Divet; moreover, her uncle had just ordered her to leave her employer. So it was necessary to apprise Madame Divet of all this without delay, and at the same time to try to find a situation in some other establishment.

Although it was Sunday, Babiole was to go at five o'clock that afternoon to take the orders of one of Madame Divet's best customers—a wealthy and extravagant foreigner, who ordered a dozen bonnets at a time, and who, only the evening before, had had two dozen sent to her upon approval. This lady lived far up the Champs Elysées, and Babiole had never yet seen her: for it was an apprentice who had delivered the bonnets at her house. Babiole, who had entered the establishment in the capacity of errand-girl, had rapidly risen in rank, and now only waited upon such customers as were worth the trouble of pleasing at any cost. After all the day's excitement, she felt no inclination to return home: on the contrary, she longed to walk, to be in the open air, and mingle with a crowd of people, so as to try and drive away her melancholy thoughts. She was also glad to have this commission to fulfil, for, on announcing her intention of leaving, she wished to be able to prove to Madame Divet that she had faithfully served her interests up to the last moment.

Accordingly, she walked down the main boulevards towards the district where her employer's customer resided; and as she tripped along, she little imagined that André was on the point of starting in the same direction. The young fellow was not particularly pleased with Chantepie's advice, for the idea of calling on Madame Vernelle and threatening her was most distasteful to him. The whole scheme savoured strongly of blackmail, and any honourable man was bound to hesitate about adopting it. It was all very well for a person like Chantepie to manœuvre in this way. Why didn't he try the plan in person, himself—he, who was so well acquainted with the antecedents of this so-called Baroness d'Orbec? André had neglected to ask him, but it was very evident that Chantepie did not wish to

put himself forward, and it was not difficult to understand his motives holding back, as he owed his position to Madame Vernelle.

However—distasteful as the cashier's plan was—André had promised Clémence to remove the obstacles that threatened to retard their marriage. She had authorized him to do so, and her father had given him *carte blanche*. André wished to marry before the end of the month, so he really had no alternative. He told himself that the end justified the means, and that to deliver a pure girl from a degraded mother, he might slightly deviate from the straight path, and endure some slight humiliation. While reasoning in this fashion, he, almost without knowing it, yielded to the desire which urged him to settle the matter as soon as possible, and walked on. It was not his will that directed his footsteps, but before he thought of stopping, he had nearly reached the end of the Avenue des Champs Élysées, along which Babirole had passed only a few moments before. A decision had now become absolutely necessary, and André felt strongly inclined to retrace his steps. But where should he go? and how should he employ his time? He was to dine with M. Vernelle the next day, but he had twenty-four hours before him, and he was in that state of mind when inaction seemed intolerable. And what happiness it would be to be able to announce complete success to Clémence and her father! Besides, what good would it do to defer the momentous step?

The more prompt his action was, the greater his chances of success would be, and nothing is so irksome as suspense. The longer he waited, the less power he would have over Madame Vernelle, who might speedily acquire a taste for the pleasures of Parisian life, and who was, perhaps even now, meditating some fresh escapade. Each day that passed would increase the scandal caused by her presence in the city where her husband and daughter resided. The prince might, moreover, become acquainted with the situation, and sever his connection with this woman. In such a case, he would have no motive for purchasing the silence of those she had so long honoured.

While André was still deliberating, he carelessly raised his eyes, and at the corner of a street near by, he read the name of the Rue Galilée. He took this for a favourable omen. It seemed to him that destiny had sent him to the house of the pretended baroness that very day and hour! and, without more ado, he walked towards her residence. He had not forgotten the number and he felt certain that this woman had returned from the Bois; night was fast coming on, and but few vehicles were left in the main avenue. Quickening his pace, he soon reached a handsome building, which bore the number indicated by Chantepie. His ring at the door was promptly answered by a bright-eyed brunette, who was doubtless Madame Vernelle's maid. "Is the Baroness d'Orbec at home?" inquired André, and he at once received the customary response: "If monsieur will have the goodness to tell me his name—"

Thereupon André, who had not thought of inventing one, replied: "Will you inform Madame d'Orbec that I have called at the request of Monsieur Vernelle, to see her on important business?"

The maid scrutinised him with annoying persistency, as though she was asking herself if this unknown visitor was likely to please her mistress. The result of her examination was doubtless favourable to Subigny, she said, with a smile: "I think the baroness will see you, sir. She is engaged, just now, with a milliner; but, for all that, I will deliver your message, and if I don't succeed, it won't be my fault."

So saying, she tripped lightly away, leaving Sullivan, for a few moments, alone in an elegant hall, which strongly resembled a conservatory, so profusely was it adorned with flowers and choice exotics. As soon as the maid came back, she asked: "Is it on behalf of Monsieur Vernelle, the banker, that you have called?" And as she spoke she stealthily scrutinised the young secretary.

"Yes," replied André, "and the business that brings me, admits of no delay."

"Then please follow me, sir. Madame says that she has not the honour of Monsieur Vernelle's acquaintance, but that she will be very glad to see you on your own account."

"On my own account."

"I gave the baroness a description of you, sir. That decided her."

André frowned. It did not flatter him in the least to owe his admission to his good looks and the charm of his attire. However, this was no time for delicate scruples. The matter in hand must be settled, then and there. The maid led the way, conducting him to the floor above by a winding staircase, decked with antique tapestry. They reached the landing, and after passing through two or three exquisitely furnished apartments, the maid opened the door of a small drawing room, at the further end of which, in the brilliant light of a dozen candles, reflected by four Venetian mirrors, he perceived the spurious baroness seated upon a sofa, in front of a lacquer-table. He recognised her at a glance as the person he had seen at the Opéra Comique, on the night before. In front of her stood a young woman who was nodding while she adjusted the trimmings of a bonnet she was holding. "I am at your service, sir," said the baroness, raising her voice, but speaking with the utmost suavity; and then turning to the young woman near her she exclaimed rather roughly. "I will keep this one, child, but you must take the other one back, and tell Madame Divet that it won't suit. It makes me look too old. With my complexion I have to wear delicate colours."

She had scarcely uttered these words when the maid reappeared, exclaiming: "Madame! the prince has come. His brougham has just stopped at the door."

This time André turned pale. Into what trap had he been lured? How was he to fulfil his mission, and how was he to beat a retreat? The idea of taking flight was most revolting to his pride, but if he remained what was he to do? However, the baroness received the announcement with unruffled calmness. It was evident that she was accustomed to such variations, and that the unexpected arrival of her lord and master did not in the least alarm her.

She rose, without any unseemly haste, made a sign to her maid—who instantly vanished—and then approached André. "Rosette did not flatter you in the least," she remarked, scrutinizing him with marvellous impudence.

It was with the utmost difficulty that André repressed the stinging remark that rose to his lips. "I cannot be mistaken," she continued. "You were at the Opéra Comique last night—alone in the box directly opposite me. You looked at me, and I looked at you. You did quite right to call, and I shall be very glad to have a chat with you. But, as you just heard, the prince is downstairs. Will you step into the next room? He won't remain long." So saying, she raised a silken door-hanging, and disclosed a smoking-room, fitted up in the Oriental style, and more especially by the curtain from the apartment in which she was about to receive the prince,

This was going too far, and André was about to vent his anger, when the young girl who held the rejected bonnet turned round, and he recognised Babiole. His amazement was so great that he could not find a word to say, but allowed himself to be pushed into the smoking-room. How Babiole recognised him? He trusted not, for he asked himself with little anxiety what she would think of his visit to this pretended baroness. From the apartment in which he now found himself, he would hear every word spoken in the drawing-room. The situation exasperated him, and he was tempted to show himself—to throw the prince his card and leave the house with Babiole. But an instant's reflection made him change his mind. Clémence and her father relied upon him to deliver them from the creature. An open scandal would ruin their hopes and his. Besides, if he were once declared, the door of this house would never open for him again. So he decided to wait, and before he had time to regain his self-possession, the prince entered the drawing-room, saying: "Good-evening, Yolande. You were not expecting me, eh?" He spoke slowly, in that singing tone which the most cosmopolitan Russians find it difficult to lay aside.

"No, certainly not," replied the baroness, calmly. "I fancied you would dine at the club, so I made my arrangements accordingly."

"Oh, I don't blame you in the least. Besides, I do intend dining at the club, but it isn't seven o'clock yet, and I wish to have a little talk with you."

"Indeed! That doesn't often happen. What do you wish to consume about?"

"Why, you are not alone! Who is this charming young person?" suddenly exclaimed the prince.

"Don't you see that it is a workwoman sent me by my milliner?"

"Your milliner certainly has good taste. Are you aware that you are positively bewitching, mademoiselle? I declare that I never saw such a pretty face as yours." This last remark was addressed to Babiole, and André did not lose a single word of it. "How old are you, mademoiselle?" continued the Russian.

"Sixteen and a half, sir," replied Babiole, without the slightest embarrassment.

"Say 'my prince,' child," cried the baroness.

"Don't frighten her, pray. I should be only too delighted if she wouldn't stand on ceremony with me," interrupted the prince. "In what establishment are you employed, mademoiselle?"

"How absurd you are, my dear Boris!" exclaimed the baroness. "Leave the child alone. I will give you my milliner's address whenever you wish it. I'm not jealous."

"What am I to say to Madame Divet, madame?" inquired Babiole coldly.

"Tell her to send me, instead of this fright of a bonnet, a pink or lilac one, trimmed with flowers—something spring-like. You can go now. You have no further need of you."

"I am going, madame."

"Au revoir, mademoiselle," added the prince.

"Adieu, sir."

André did not see her leave the room, but he heard her proud reply and thought: "The brave girl! She is poor; she is a child of the people, and yet she doesn't cringe in the presence of this rich adventuress or this titled libertine. And she is determined to defend herself. The fact that

she didn't tell them of her intention to leave Madame Divet's is proof that she did not want them to find her. But her unscrupulous employer is quite capable of giving them her address in the Rue Lamartine. They little dream that I will protect her against their desires."

Meanwhile, the baroness raised her silvery voice, saying: "You are incorrigible, my dear prince. It is time for a man to reform when he reaches the age of sixty."

"And for a woman when she arrives at the age of forty," sneered the prince.

"Was it to speak impertinently that you came here?"

"Hasn't Valdès been here to-day?"

"No, Valdès hasn't been here. Did you wish to see him?"

"Yes, I miss him very much—our excellent Valdès. He is so deferential to me, and he has so much wit. He repeats to me all the good things he has read in the newspapers. But, excuse my plain speaking, baroness, it seems to me our mutual friend is not looking well. I think a change would do him good. You, also, baroness, must find it rather disagreeable here. You ought to spend the winter in Italy—with Valdès."

"Is this an order or merely a bit of advice?" inquired the baroness, hastily.

"Merely a bit of advice," replied the prince, quietly. "I have no right to give you any orders."

"But you are master here, my dear Boris, and you have only to command to be promptly obeyed. However, if it is merely a piece of advice that you have just given me, I will frankly own that I haven't the slightest desire to shut myself up in Rome or Florence this winter."

"Not even at Monaco—you were formerly very fond of play?"

"Monaco would suit me very well but I am not at all bored in Paris; oh! not in the least. In fact, I am enjoying myself immensely. I had been longing to return here for ten years past, and I certainly shan't take myself off on the morrow of my arrival."

"You will make a great mistake if you remain. Your husband will certainly meet you sooner or later."

"My husband? You must be dreaming! Many years have elapsed since I became a widow."

"So you have told me, but I have never had any proofs of it. I don't even know your unfortunate husband's name."

"You will jest on every occasion. The Baroness d'Orbec was necessarily the wife of Baron d'Orbec."

"I have mentioned this name once or twice at my club, and no one there had ever heard it before, although many of the members are thoroughly acquainted with the French nobility."

"Then you think I have invented this story, I suppose?"

"I have expressed no such opinion, but I should very much like to see your marriage certificate, as well as that of your husband's death."

"What for? You scarcely have any intention of marrying me."

"Ha, ha! who knows? I am growing old, as you reminded me just now. I am tired of the life I am leading, and I sometimes ask myself if I should not do as well to settle down in France, purchase a large estate one or two hundred miles from Paris, and end my days with you in the country. We could entertain all the gentry in the neighbourhood. It would amuse me vastly to see their wives paying their respects to you. We might take Valdès with us. It would be delightful!"

"Are you in earnest?"

"It is a plan that I submit to your approval. But in order to carry into execution, I must of course be certain that you are a widow. If you are not, it would be no laughing matter. Bigamy is a serious offence."

"Which would carry us both before the assizes. Don't be alarmed, prince, I have no desire for such a fate. I will show you my marriage certificate, as well as a certificate of my husband's death; but you must give me time to procure them."

"Oh, I am in no particular hurry. I have no objections to remaining a couple of months longer in Paris."

"Ah, well, before that time is up, you shall have all the evidence you desire. I haven't much hope that you will marry me, but I am anxious to please you. I will at once write to my notary in the country, but legal formalities always require some time, and—"

"Oh, I will wait. I sincerely hope, however, that I shall be subjected to no annoyance on your account. I came to Paris to enjoy myself, and don't at all wish to be involved in any scandal. There are newspapers here that make a speciality of spicy news, and I should be greatly enraged if I read some morning: 'Prince L—— was at the theatre last night with the Baroness d'Or——, a married woman with whose past career many of our readers are familiar.'"

"You have nothing of that kind to fear. Parisians have very short memories. No one here remembers me now. Besides, as I said before, in a few weeks I shall be able to convince you, beyond any possible doubt, that my husband isn't living."

"Try and do so as soon as possible. Time hangs rather heavily on my hands here, and I may take it into my head to leave at any time, unless the fancy I feel for this little *grisette* should detain me. She is really very pretty."

"Thanks," said the baroness, laughing.

"Oh! I intended no reflection upon you. We are little more than pairs of friend, remember, and, by the way, when you see this pretty milliner again, I should consider it a great favour if you would say a word or two on my behalf."

"As she seems a little shy, I think I had better send her employee to you."

"Thanks; however, you must excuse me if I leave you now. I won four thousand francs at *bisique* yesterday, and I promised to give my adversary his revenge to-day before dinner. He is waiting for me at the club, so till we meet again. Don't forget those certificates."

The baroness rose to accompany the prince to the door, and while she was talking with him in the ante-room, André Subigny, concealed behind the silken curtain, indulged in some strange reflections. By a singular coincidence the prince had just broached the very subject which André himself wished to discuss with Clémence's mother. Madame d'Orbec was now prepared for the ultimatum he intended to submit to her, and he might reasonably hope that she would consent to it. Chantepie had told the truth. This Russian dreaded anything like a scandal, and perhaps he already had an inkling of the husband's existence, as he required the baroness to prove that she was a widow. She had just pledged herself to furnish him with satisfactory proofs within a brief delay; so she must feel certain that M. Vernelle would soon die. André recollected the attempt at poisoning, and asked himself, if this woman could have planned

the crime in order to be free to contract a second marriage. She did not allow him much time for reflection, however: for on taking leave of the prince she hastened back to release her prisoner.

"Come, sir," she said, lifting the door-latching: "thank you for having waited so patiently. You must have been terribly bored, but I hope you bear me no ill-will. I could not turn the prince out of doors, and I thought you would not care to be presented to him."

"No, madame, I have no business with him," replied André curtly.

"I should think not," replied the baroness, simpering. "Well, we are alone, at last. Sit down, and let us talk."

She motioned André to a low chair near the sofa upon which she had just seated herself in a studied attitude, turning her back to the light, and presenting a three-quarter view of her face which lacked freshness, although her features were still handsome. As André looked at her, he was grieved to note that she strongly resembled Clémence.

"I noticed you last night at the theatre," the baroness began, "and I saw that you honoured me with a good deal of attention. I was greatly flattered by your notice, and I am delighted to see you again, although I do not know you at all. Audacity is very becoming in young men, I think, and your ardour pleases me. But how did you manage to learn my name and address so quickly? I resided in Paris a long time ago, but many years' absence have made me virtually a stranger here."

"Excuse me, madame," coolly replied Sublimy, who had remained standing, "but your maid must have told you that I called at the request of Monsieur Vernelle."

"That, of course, was only an excuse for asking to see me. You mentioned the first name that occurred to you. It was very clever on your part; I like men of tact."

"You are greatly mistaken, madame. It was no invention. I am really sent by Monsieur Vernelle."

"I thought you said Cornelle or Tournelle, and as I supposed you were only making use of some fictitious name, I paid no attention to it. But who is this Monsieur Vernelle?" continued the baroness with unblushing effrontery.

"Your husband, madame, as you know perfectly well."

The spurious baroness started, but she was not at all abashed. On the contrary, she replied, with a shrug of the shoulders: "What an absurd joke! I am a widow, sir, and you are not ignorant of the fact; for you must have listened to my conversation with the prince. Oh, I don't blame you. It was not of a private nature. Had I had anything to conceal from you, I should not have left you in the smoking-room."

"I heard the whole conversation, of course; but I repeat that I am speaking seriously. You were born in Normandy; your father was a Monsieur de Buequeville, and about twenty years ago you married Monsieur Vernelle, the well-known banker. You see that I am well-informed respecting you."

This time the baroness changed countenance. Her eyes flashed, and she looked at André with a spiteful air. "Even supposing that all this be true, what is the object of your visit?" she asked. "In the first place, who are you?"

André was on the point of giving his name, but he recollected Chantepie's advice on the subject, so he contented himself with replying: "I am Monsieur Vernelle's private secretary."

"Oh, I begin to understand," responded the baroness scornfully. "I can even guess who gave you so much information. You think your employer is looking for me, that I am anxious to conceal my presence in Paris from him, and so you hope to make me purchase your silence. What price do you set upon it?"

André turned pale with anger, but remembering Clémence, he restrained himself. "Your husband was at the Opéra Comique last night," he replied. "He saw you enter a proscenium box, and he immediately left the theatre. This morning he charged me with a mission which I have come here to fulfil. I left him but a few moments ago, and I shall see him again to-morrow."

"What does he desire of me?"

"He wishes you to leave Paris immediately."

"And does he imagine I shall obey him?"

"He has means of compelling you to leave, and he will avail himself of them, if you refuse to go of your own accord."

"What means, pray?"

"He will institute proceedings against you and the prince. It will cost him much to resort to such extreme measures, but he will not shrink from them, I assure you. The prince will certainly have cause to regret the day he brought you here. In any case he will learn that you are a married woman, and you know what would be the consequences of such a revelation."

"But what if I should agree to go away?"

"In that case, Monsieur Vernelle will consent to ignore your existence; that is, providing you pledge yourself in writing never to set foot in France again; but if you fail to keep your promise, he will be at liberty to act as he sees fit, and, on the next occasion, he will show you no mercy. Now will you accept your husband's conditions, yes or no? He wishes you to leave Paris immediately, and give your formal consent to the marriage of—"

"My daughter," interrupted Madame Vernelle.

"Then you have not forgotten that you have a daughter?" said Subligny bitterly.

"No, sir, although she has forgotten her mother."

"You are no longer her mother," retorted André, bitterly.

"You are too young to criticise my actions, sir. You were but a child when I left the man whom I most unfortunately married, and whom I never loved. It is true that I have made no attempt to see my daughter since; but what would you have said of me had I acted otherwise? I preferred to let her believe that I was dead; and if Monsieur Vernelle has told her my story, he is very much to blame."

"He would have continued concealing it from her if you had not returned to Paris."

"My daughter would not know me if she saw me."

"You are very much mistaken. She was at the Opéra Comique last night with her father, and she recognised you at once; she now knows your real character."

"That is to say, she despises and denies me. I do not believe it; and I will prove to her that I have been basely slandered. I hate my husband and I care nothing for his commands; if he provoked the scandal which he threatens me, he would suffer far more than I should. However I love my daughter, and I won't refuse to do anything she may wish. If she desires it, I will leave Paris. You tell me also that she wishes

marry. No doubt she knows that she cannot do so without her mother's consent. Well, I will grant it. But when is she going to marry?"

"I am not authorised to tell you."

"I must know, nevertheless, before I can give my consent."

"There is nothing to prevent you from giving a written consent without mentioning the name of the person she is to marry."

"And you imagine that will suffice? It is very evident that you never studied law."

"No, madame; but—"

"Well, I can tell you something which you seem to be ignorant of. There are two ways for a mother to authorise her daughter's marriage. The first, and the one most in vogue, is to accompany her to the mayor's office."

"Never!"

"I understand. My daughter would blush for me. Well, I will not inflict this humiliation upon her. The other plan is for the mother to give her consent in a document drawn up by a notary, and signed in his presence. I have reason to know something on this subject. My father was opposed to my marriage, and refused to be present at it, so he went to England, and there signed the consent that his notary sent him from France. There is nothing to prevent me from doing as my father did."

"That is all that Monsieur Vernelle asks."

"Don't speak of him. Speak of Clémence. She is very charming, is she not? I hope she loves the man she is going to marry."

"She loves him, and he loves her."

The baroness looked André straight in the eyes. "And you are the man?" she said.

"Yes, madame, I am," replied André, without the least hesitation.

"I am glad to hear it. She, at least, will be happy. I wouldn't have allowed her father to marry her to any one against her will; but I am amazed that he has chosen you, for no like men of his own stamp, and he is so avaricious that he wouldn't give his daughter to anyone in petty circumstances. So I suppose you are rich."

"No, madame, I have nothing in the world."

"Then Monsieur Vernelle must have greatly changed. In fact, I hear that he is in very bad health."

"Who told you so?"

"Some one who knows. He has not two months to live, I am told."

"Is that the reason why you just procured the prince the certificate of your husband's death?" exclaimed Sabine. "You are very much mistaken. Monsieur Vernelle won't die. He has been very ill, it is true; but he has discovered the cause of his illness, and his recovery is certain."

"A long life to him! I don't wish for his death. It was his cashier who informed me that his health was failing every day."

"Chantepie! Have you seen him?"

"No; he wrote to me. He has not forgotten that he owes his position to me, and he has kept up a correspondence with me—unknown to his employer. I do wrong to tell you this, for now it is in your power to have him dismissed. I should add, however, that he gave me no intimation of my daughter's intended marriage. He is probably ignorant of it. I must ask him to call on me."

"Then you intend to prolong your sojourn in Paris? I warn you that Monsieur Vernelle won't modify his decision."

"He will at least grant me a respite of forty-eight hours?"

"Forty-eight hours, but no more."

"Are you in such a great hurry to get married?" inquired the baroness ironically.

"I wish the wedding to take place before the end of the present month," replied André. "I know, of course, that it is in your power to delay its celebration by refusing your consent. If you do withhold it, two years must elapse before Mademoiselle Vernelle can dispense with it. In that case, we will wait; and when the time for the marriage comes, there will be no further need of secrecy, for you will have been publicly convicted and condemned."

This was said in a tone which convinced Madame Vernelle there was nothing left for her but submission. However, she wished to explain what she submitted. "I love my daughter, and nothing could induce me to cause her any sorrow," she said. "It isn't difficult for me to believe that she loves you; and I would not mar her happiness. But I wish her distinctly understand that I am not influenced by her father's threats, but that I make the sacrifice solely for her sake. I will leave Paris for Monaco on the day after to-morrow, and I shall afterwards repair to Italy. As for the promise never to return to France, it is useless for me to make it. If I should return, my husband would hear of it, and he could then enter complaint against me. As long as he lives I shall not expose myself to his vengeance which would cost my daughter—and you—so dear."

"And before you go you will sign the consent?"

"No, sir. I will not disclose my real name to any Paris lawyer. You can understand why. Monsieur Vernelle can choose his notary, and explain my absence to him as he sees fit; I leave him the task of inventing a plausible story. Let him say, if he chooses, that by reason of an accident I am unable to make a long journey to be present at my daughter's marriage. This notary, having no interest in making difficulties, will be content with his client's assertion, and will at once draw up the required document, and forward it to one of his colleagues at Monaco for me to sign it. The mayor who marries you will require nothing more. Nor will you, I suppose?" added Madame Vernelle, with a questioning look.

"I think Monsieur Vernelle will be satisfied with your promise," replied André, after a moment's hesitation; "but if you fail to keep it—"

"He will prosecute me, eh? He would have no more pity on his daughter than on me. He would take proceedings also against the prince, who would be furious with me on account of the scandal, and, who, if I learnt that I am not a widow would immediately break with me. An anonymous letter would do the work effectually."

"If he receives one, it will certainly not come either from Monsieur Vernelle or myself," Subigny quickly rejoined.

"Or from my daughter, I hope."

"Mademoiselle Vernelle knows nothing at all about your present life."

"She knows that I am here, as she saw me at the Opéra Comique last night; but I can forgive her for feeling very little interest in her mother. She is not her own mistress, and she will not be free to follow the dictates of her heart as long as she remains under her father's authority. But her feelings will change by-and-bye."

"I think not," replied André, in sullen wrath; "and I advise you not to rely upon the widowhood which you promised to prove conclusively."

within a stated time. I heard you pledge yourself to show the prince the certificate of your husband's death in less than two months."

"Very well; then I shan't show it to him, that is all. It was a whim that suddenly seized hold of him. When once I am out of Paris he will forget all about it. Chantepie misled me by writing me that his employer could not live six weeks longer. I can see very plainly that you don't like Chantepie. You are perfectly right. You perceive that I am frank with you. Chantepie certainly rendered me very valuable services many years ago; but I can not say that I have much confidence in him. And as a proof that I bear you no ill-will, I advise you to be on your guard, and not to place too much confidence in that man. He took my part years ago, but I think him quite capable of serving two masters, for in reality, he only thinks of himself. He is very ambitious, and of a more vindictive disposition than you would probably suppose. I should no doubt astonish you very much if I told you why he hates my husband and daughter so bitterly."

"Hates them!" replied Subigny. "Why, I thought he was devoted to Monsieur Vernelle; and I was not aware that he had ever bestowed a thought upon Mademoiselle Clémence. What have they done for him to hate them?"

"Nothing. The facts are simply these: I interested myself in Chantepie's behalf because I believed he was devoted to me. He had learned a secret of mine, and he kept it faithfully. Indeed, as far as I know, he has kept it even up to the present time. But he had no sooner entered the house, than the idea of becoming my husband's partner and marrying Clémence occurred to him. Pray note, that Clémence was only nine years old at the time. But Chantepie is a wily and patient fellow. He disclosed his plans to me, and at the very first allusion to his hopes I laughed in his face; but, unfortunately, I had my reasons for not wishing to quarrel with him just then, and shortly afterwards I left my husband and France. I knew very well that Clémence would snub Chantepie as he deserved; so, as I was anxious to have news of her, I allowed him to write to me. He availed himself of the permission to such an extent, that during the last ten years I have received a letter from him every month. In the latter ones, he displayed any amount of rancour, which was easily accounted for, as in his earlier notes he had not concealed from me that my husband kept him at a distance, and that Clémence shewed a decided aversion to him. I did not see or hear anything, of course, for I was not on the spot; but I am almost sure that he must have made overtures to Monsieur Vernelle—overtures which were summarily rejected; and I shouldn't be in the least surprised if he had ventured to make a declaration of love to my daughter. In any case, he hates her and her father. He thirsts for revenge, there isn't the slightest doubt of it, though I can't tell what he hopes to gain by vengeance, or how he means to act. It is certain, however, that he has already set to work, for my return to France was in a great measure due to him. I had long desired to return, but hesitated—I feared to injure my daughter by my presence—you may believe me or not as you like. It was Chantepie, however, who wrote to me quite recently that no one in Paris remembered me, and that Monsieur Vernelle would never meet me, as he only visited a few friends who had never known me, and who never associated with foreigners. I am now satisfied, however, that, in enticing me here, Chantepie had no other object than to humiliate Clémence, and make my husband suffer. But

he won't be content with that. He must be preparing some more cruel revenge."

"And yet you remain on intimate terms with him?"

"Intimate is hardly the word. Since my arrival he has written to me twice to apologise for not coming to see me. He declared that my husband was very ill, that his life, in fact, was in danger, and that he, as the cashier of the house, could not absent himself while his employer was unable to attend to business."

"Has he also told you that Monsieur Vernelle is ruined, or well-nigh ruined?"

"Good heavens! My daughter will have no dowry, then?"

"It is for that very reason that I am going to marry her."

"You should have told me that in the first place, sir. If you had done so, I should immediately have given you my consent." Then seeing the expression of astonishment, even incredulity, on André's face: "I see that you do not understand women," she continued. "Because I brave public opinion, and ignore many social prejudices, you think that I have no heart. Because I voluntarily parted from my daughter, you believed that I no longer love her. You are very much mistaken, sir. I am ready to do anything to spare her pain. The only really hard sacrifice is that of foregoing the happiness of witnessing her marriage. However, I will not raise any obstacles. I shall leave at once for Monte Carlo, where I shall stay at the Grand Hotel, and when my husband's notary has drawn up the necessary document, and sent it to his Monaco colleague, I will explain and prove to the latter that my maiden name was De Bacqueville, and that I am married to Monsieur Vernelle. I will sign the document in the notary's presence, and it shall be returned to you by the next mail. Farewell, sir. I will detain you no longer."

André bowed, and was about to withdraw without another word, when she said to him, with an emotion which was probably sincere:

"Swear to me that you love her, and that she loves you!"

"I swear it, madame," replied André, touched in spite of himself.

"That is well, never speak to her of me, and make her happy."

André did not reply, but immediately left the room, heaving a sigh of relief. The strange scene had bewildered him. All manner of ideas flashed through his mind. This degraded mother horrified him, and yet he could not help pitying her. Her cynicism, in the early part of their interview, had been most revolting; but the noble sentiments she had expressed at its close, had touched him. He could not understand this want of harmony between heart and conduct. He had not lived long enough to know that inconsistency is one of women's chief characteristics, and that degradation does not destroy maternal love. "Her husband judged her aright," he murmured, as he descended the stairs; "she is virtually unconscious of what she does. I am sure that her emotion wasn't feigned, and that, at this moment, she is ready to make any sacrifice to spare her daughter pain. If she were now asked to retire into a convent, she would do so; but by to-morrow all these generous resolutions will be forgotten. She will resume her old life, and everything will go on as before. I did wrong not to demand a written promise. But no—she will leave Paris, if only to please the Russian prince, who seems very anxious to get rid of her. To what depths of degradation has the poor creature fallen! Clémence has no idea of it, and I hope she never will! I certainly have no intention of telling her, either before or after our marriage. I have

secured all that Monsieur Vernelle desired—her immediate departure and consent. The idea of having the latter signed in the presence of a notary at Monaco is a good one. Strange to say, it originated with her. Heaven grant she may not change her mind!”

He left the house sick at heart. He longed to breathe the fresh air, recover his self-possession, and calmly consider the change in the situation which this interview had just brought about. Reaching the Champs Elysees, he walked along towards the Place de la Concorde, without knowing exactly where he was going, or how he should spend his evening. M. Vernelle had given him leave of absence until dinner-time the next day. This was equivalent to stating that he wished to be left alone with his daughter for the next twenty-four hours, and André dared not intrude upon him before the appointed time. Babiole, on her side, had made an engagement with him for the following morning, and no doubt she had good reasons for not asking him to call earlier. Determined to comply with both requests, André found himself, in the meantime, condemned to inaction, whereat he was greatly annoyed, for he particularly wished to confer with his prospective father-in-law, as well as with the pretty milliner of the Rue Lamartine. It was on the one hand of the utmost importance that Vernelle should be informed of his wife's decision, so that he might at once request some notary to draw up the document which was to be sent to Monaco. It was also equally important that Babiole should be warned of the danger that threatened her. She had no doubt noticed that the prince had taken a great fancy to her, but she had not heard the conversation which had taken place between him and Madame d'Orbec after her departure; and André felt that he had not a moment to lose if he was to defeat the purpose of those who were conspiring against her.

However, after all, his mind was mainly occupied with Chantepie, who now appeared to him in a new character. The cashier was evidently a scoundrel; Madame Vernelle's revelations had settled that point beyond doubt; but the most important fact that she had communicated was that Chantepie hated the banker, whose bread he ate, and also Mademoiselle Vernelle. He had sworn to be avenged upon them for their disdain; and his every act must tend to the furtherance of his purpose. Why, then, was he working so zealously, trying to bring about Subigny's marriage? Clémence loved André; and M. Vernelle wished to see them united; yet Chantepie, who execrated both the father and the daughter, was doing his best to insure the success of their most cherished plans. It seemed, really, incomprehensible. Evidently enough all this concealed mystery must be cleared up; but though André concentrated his attention upon the problem, he did not succeed in solving it. He carefully reviewed the facts, but he could not discover Chantepie's object in promoting the marriage. The cashier could not be actuated by a desire to obtain his money, for he now knew perfectly well that Vernelle was a ruined man, and that his daughter would not have a penny. Nor could he be acting out of friendship for André, for the manner in which he had reminded the young secretary of his liabilities only a few hours before, showed conclusively that he had no real liking for him, and could only have been actuated by self-interest in rendering him such an important service. No doubt he wished to bind André to him by links of gratitude, in order to have him completely under his control, and make him the docile instrument of his secret plans.

Now, the first use he had made of his power, had been to advise, or

rather command, André to marry Mademoiselle Vernelle as soon as possible. Could he, then, expect that this marriage would bring misery upon Clémence whom he hated so bitterly for having scorned his own pretensions? He knew, however, that the two young persons he was trying to unite loved each other. He knew, also, that Subligny was intelligent, clever and industrious, and that he would be sure to succeed in life and keep his wit from want.

The explanation of the riddle might be found, perhaps, in some secret with which André was not acquainted, but which Madame Vernelle probably knew perfectly well. She had, indeed, admitted to Subligny that Chantepie had, in former years, discovered a secret which had placed her completely in his power, but which he had faithfully kept up to the present time; André, not attaching much importance to the information at that moment, had not urged her to explain herself further. However, no matter what was the nature of this secret, Chantepie had certainly made use of it to compel the erring wife to obtain him a situation as cashier in her husband's bank, and he had retained the position thus secured by threatening her with exposure.

He had probably been aware of one of her earlier intrigues; but after the scandal caused by her flight, she had nothing to lose, and could afford to laugh at his menaces. Thereupon he had changed his tactics, becoming her correspondent and spy, keeping her fully informed respecting everything that occurred in M. Vernelle's household, and finally urging her to return to Paris. Now, as Chantepie never did anything without hoping to reap advantage from it, his change of conduct evidently had a motive, which, it might be, was connected with some Machiavellian scheme against Vernelle and his daughter. What scheme this was, André had no idea; still, one fact was proved beyond doubt: Chantepie was, as Babiole had asserted, a bad man, a scoundrel not unlike the hero of one of Eugène Sue's romances—Atar-Gull, the negro slave, who tortures his master while pretending to serve him with boundless devotion, and who finds a way to gratify his implacable hatred while posing as a model of virtue.

Chantepie had undoubtedly lured Madame Vernelle to Paris for the sake of his revenge; and he might even now be trying to complete his work. But how is one to fight a concealed enemy? Soldiers in battle are frequently struck by shells fired from cannons which they cannot see; and André found himself in a similar predicament; but he finally came to the conclusion that Chantepie would have to show his hand sooner or later, and that it then would be time enough to retaliate upon him. For the moment, Chantepie seemed inclined to retire from the field, for he had resigned his position as cashier; and his resignation would sever his connection with the banker, and put an end to his visits to the house; hence, his perfidious dealings were no longer to be dreaded.

The attempts to poison the banker, which might reasonably be attributed to him, were still unexplained. The scamp was certainly capable of trying to rid the baroness of her husband in this way, though he had probably attempted it without consulting her; for, so far as Subligny could judge, she was not the woman to connive at such a cowardly crime. Fortunately, the attempt had not proved successful; due warning had been given. M. Vernelle would not continue taking the bromide, and his daughter would certainly watch over his safety. The rest was the business of Dr. Valbrègue and the police, providing the former deemed it advisable to institute an investigation. It devolved upon them to question the druggist who had

made up the prescription, and to ascertain through whose hands the medicine had passed before it reached the banker's house, and even afterwards. As for André, he had no desire to become mixed up in this affair. He certainly had plenty of other matters on his hands.

The Avenue des Champs Elysees is long, and before the young fellow reached the Place de la Concorde, he had considerable time for reflection; but he was not much the wiser for it, as he had not decided upon any plan of action, or even how he should spend his evening. The simplest plan would be to dine at the nearest restaurant, and then return home and go to bed, in view of mustering strength for the next day, which threatened to be an exciting one. He usually took his meals at a little restaurant near his rooms; but he sometimes met other employes of the bank there, and was obliged to talk to them for fear of being considered proud. They would now certainly question him respecting M. Vernelle's financial embarrassments, and as André by no means cared to tell them the truth, he felt anxious to avoid them. As he walked up the Rue Royale towards the Madeleine, he espied an English tavern, bearing as a sign the inscription, "His Lordship's Larder." More beer than wine was consumed there, and boiled cabbage was in greater demand than truffles; however, André was not a gourmand, and, besides, he hoped he should there find what he most desired: solitude. He went in, seated himself with his back to the door, and ordered a very plain dinner which he soon dispatched. At his age worry does not take away one's appetite. He had reached his dessert, that is to say, the cheese, for he seldom indulged in delicacies, when the sound of conversation behind him suddenly attracted his attention. The weather was so mild that the landlord had opened the windows, so that inside the establishment one could readily overhear what passed in the street. Two passers-by had just seated themselves at one of the little tables set out in front of the tavern, and as their backs were turned to André, they could not see him or *recognise* him. "So you have left?" said one of the newcomers. "What kind of a face did he make when you tendered your resignation?"

"He showed no surprise," replied the other. "I think he must have expected it. He is irretrievably ruined. He can never recover from the blow."

"We shall neither of us shed many tears about it. We have got all we can out of him, and we can now start a business of our own, which will be more prosperous than his ever was. I suppose you still hold to our going into partnership?"

"More than ever; I think it would be advisable not to begin operations until after the fifteenth. I want to finish with this man first."

"But he is effectually done for. When he has discharged his liabilities, he won't have a copper left."

"That is not enough for me. I want him to die of grief—he and his daughter too. I have reasons for wishing that, and the mine I've laid will blow up one of these days. However, I must have time to fire it."

"Go a-head, my dear fellow, I won't interfere with you, though I have no particular grudge against them. It is the little secretary I hate. I would willingly give ten thousand francs for an opportunity to get even with him, for he robbed me of a very pretty girl the other evening, and insulted me into the bargain."

"I have something in reserve for him that he will remember, never fear, and it will cost you nothing, old fellow."

"If you will punish him, Chantepie, I shall be your debtor for life. what you told me this evening true? I mean that he is going to marry the daughter, all the same?"

"I hope and believe so."

"But what do you mean to do?"

"Never mind, Bertaud. I know what I am about, and you will see by and-bye."

"I ask nothing better. Still, I feel awfully riled when I think how the little milliner foiled me. I must try to get hold of her again. I'll go and see her employer, Madame Divet, to-morrow. She is a woman of infinite resources."

"She'll arrange matters all right. But, come, let us be off. The baroness dines at eight o'clock, and I want to introduce you to her to-day."

The two scoundrels walked quietly away, and André, who had heard the whole conversation, although it was carried on in an undertone, took good care not to turn while Chantepie was settling for the glasses of beer which he and Bertaud had drunk.

André now knew beyond any possible doubt that they had leagueed themselves together to defraud and ruin M. Vernelle, and that the cashier was reserving some terrible surprise for his wedding day, but he could not imagine what it was. "He perhaps intends to produce the receipt I signed, or else to give Clémence the letter he took from my table, the letter in which I confessed that I was a thief. Ah! well, I shall confess the truth to my wife, and she will forgive me."

VIII.

WHEN Babiole hurriedly took leave of André at the door of the banker's residence in the Rue Bergère, she had told him she should be at home all day on the morrow, but she afterwards regretted having said so, as she was anxious to go to the shop and inform Madame Divet that she was about to leave her. After the Opéra Comique scene, Babiole had resolved to sever her connection with that unprincipled woman, and her uncle's approval and the incidents that had occurred at the baroness's residence had only strengthened her previous determination. She was not so unsophisticated as to be blind to the Russian prince's admiration, and to his very evident desire to see her again; and so feeling satisfied that her employer would not hesitate to serve as his intermediary, she wished to escape from his authority without delay. On the other hand, however, she was anxious not to miss André's visit. Still she hoped that he would call early in the morning; but when ten o'clock came, and he had failed to make his appearance, she began to fear that he did not intend to keep his promise, and asked herself if it would not be as well for her to go to the Boulevard Magenta. She at last decided to wait a little while longer, for she particularly desired to have an explanation with M. Subigny, though she knew that the interview would be a painful, and, most probably, a final one; for she had no intention of accepting the friendly overtures of Mademoiselle Vernelle, who had invited her to repeat her visit, and even to attend the wedding.

Babiole had recognised André perfectly when she met him at the Baroness d'Orbec's. She had seen him conceal himself in the smoking-room, and she did not know what to think of him, for his presence in such

company seemed to her inexcusable. She naturally had no intention of reproaching him for his conduct: that was Mademoiselle Vernille's business, supposing anything were amiss, but she was extremely anxious to tell him all she knew about Marbeuf. She felt that she had no right to prolong her old neighbour's captivity at the hospital, but from a fear of doing him an injury it was necessary, first of all, to reveal his whereabouts to André Subdiany. The latter, who must know the truth concerning Marbeuf, would decide whether it was better to let him remain a nameless patient in the Necker Hospital, or to secure his release by revealing his name and relating his history to Dr. Valbrègue. "I will tell Monsieur André everything," thought Babiole, "and then try to forget everything and everybody connected with the affair, even him."

But it would prove a difficult task; and in her secret heart poor Babiole had little hope of success, still she wished to put an end to an equivocal situation. A half-past ten, just as she was closing the window she had opened, in order to hang out her goldfinch's cage, there came a knock at the door. She ran to open it. The visitor was André. "You are just in time," she remarked rather coldly. "I was about going out."

"You appointed no hour," replied the young man, "and I feared I might inconvenience you if I came early."

"Oh, I am always up by daybreak; but that is not at all strange, as I generally go to bed with the chickens. To-day, however, I might have played the sluggard, for I am not going to the shop. But come in, and let us talk. I shouldn't offer to show you my apartments. They are not worth it."

"They remind me of the inestimable service you rendered me, however. Here is the window you were looking through when you saw me take poor Marbeuf's revolver from the wall. Had it not been for you, I should have died by my own hand."

"Even human weaknesses sometimes work for good. Had I not been naturally inquisitive, I shouldn't have looked out, and you would, perhaps, have destroyed yourself. Still, I can't imagine why you wanted to commit suicide. I never asked you, I think."

"I should hardly have known what to tell you, if you had. A great disappointment—I am very excitable, I lost my head, and—"

"And now that you have become so happy, you have no desire to repeat the experiment."

"No, I assure you; though the happiness you speak of is not unalloyed, by any means."

"What more do you wish? Your marriage is decided upon, and the young lady you are to marry is very charming. When will the wedding take place?"

"In about ten days' time, if nothing happens amiss; but perhaps something may occur to defer it."

"You haven't changed your mind, I suppose. I was present at your betrothal. A promise of marriage is sacred."

"I know it. Why do you suppose that I don't intend to keep mine?"

"Why? Because I saw you last evening at the house of a person who can hardly wish you to marry."

"You recognised me, then?"

"Of course. As I said before, the lady seemed inclined to keep you to herself, and you, yourself, did not seem to be averse to such an arrangement, as you concealed yourself in the smoking-room."

André blushed to his very ears. It seemed to him that he might have spared this new perplexity. Babiole evidently thought that he was Madame d'Orbec's lover. How could he undeceive her without betraying a family secret, without confessing that the so-called baroness was Clérence's mother, and M. Vernelle's lawful wife? "Mademoiselle," he at last said, "I assure you upon my honour as a gentleman, that I entered the house in the Rue Galilée for the first time yesterday, and that I had never before set eyes on the person who received me. Besides, she will leave Paris to-morrow, never to return. I also assure you that my object in calling upon her was a most laudable one. You won't doubt this, when I tell you that Monsieur Vernelle and his daughter not only authorised me but begged of me to go there. I can say no more just now, but later on, perhaps, you will learn the truth, if we remain friends, as I sincerely hope we shall."

"I believe you, sir."

"I thank you for not doubting my word, and to convince you that there is nothing between this Baroness d'Orbec and myself, I will tell you what I overheard after your departure."

"Oh! I need no proofs."

"But you were the subject of the conversation, mademoiselle. The baroness is a most unscrupulous woman, as you must have suspected, and after you had left, she promised the Russian prince, who paid you so many compliments, to give him the address of your employer, who, so she assured him, would gladly speak to you in his favour. It was my duty to warn you of this. I have done so; and I also beg that you will rely upon my help, if necessary, at any time."

"I expected no less of you, but I sha'n't require assistance. I can protect myself. All the princes in the world couldn't frighten me. I shall dispose of this one as I disposed of Monsieur Bertaud. As for my employer, I intend to leave her establishment to-day, as I informed you yesterday, before I left you to Monsieur Chantepie's tender mercies."

"However, she may give your address to the prince, who will send emissaries to you. I think him even capable of presenting himself to you."

"It would be the first time a prince ever climbed to my garret," laughed Babiole. "He would certainly have a hard time of it—four flights—seventy-two stairs to climb—and he would not be admitted even when I got here. Besides, if all these persons try to persecute me, I shall move and go and live in the same house as my uncle. However, in the meantime, I am not in the least afraid of them, I assure you. But, speaking of my uncle, it was by going to see him that I discovered Monsieur Marbeuf."

"Marbeuf!" exclaimed Subligny. "What! was it your uncle who found him?"

"No, my uncle is in a hospital, and he knew nothing whatever about my unfortunate neighbour."

"How, then, did you happen to discover Marbeuf's whereabouts?"

"Well, my uncle is in the Saint Ferdinand Ward of the Necker Hospital, and his bed is Number Twenty. The one opposite, Number Nineteen, is occupied by Monsieur Marbeuf, and yesterday being visiting-day—on going to the hospital—"

"You saw Marbeuf?"

"Yes. I recognised him at the first glance. He hasn't changed at all except that he is a trifle thinner."

"And you spoke to him? You asked him—"

"I did nothing of the kind. He either didn't recognise me, or pretended not to recognise me. I believe, however, that he has lost his memory entirely."

"You say he is at the Necker Hospital? Why, then his must be the extraordinary case that Dr. Vallbrègue was telling us about, on the day before yesterday, at Monsieur Vernelle's!"

"Probably it is, as your friend is under Dr. Vallbrègue's charge."

"And has been for about a month, has he not?"

"A little over a month, judging from what I heard. He was picked up in the street, and carried to the hospital in a state of insensibility. Since he has recovered consciousness, he can remember nothing, not even his name, or the accident that reduced him to this condition. He has no more memory than if he had been born only yesterday; at least so he pretends."

"What do you mean by that? Do you think he is only feigning a loss of memory?"

"I know nothing at all about it; but my uncle fancies that such is the case."

"But what possible object could he have?"

"I don't know, and that is why I said nothing."

"Then no one at the hospital has any suspicion who he is?"

"My uncle knows. I told him, but made him promise to be silent on the subject until my next visit, on Thursday. I didn't like to tell what I knew, until I had consulted you, though one of the assistant doctors plied me with questions."

"I don't clearly understand the reason of your silence. Marbeuf must be very miserable in the hospital."

"But he would be far more wretched in prison."

"In prison!" exclaimed Subigny. "What do you mean? Why should he be sent to prison?"

"It is I who ought to ask that question. You are probably well acquainted with your friend's affairs, and know his reasons for concealing his name much better than I do."

André started. The idea suggested by Babiole had not occurred to him before, but it now made a deep impression upon his mind.

"I would tell you what my uncle said, if I dared," continued the girl.

"What is there to prevent your telling it? I am very anxious to obtain all possible information on the subject."

"Ah, well, he is of the opinion that Monsieur Marbeuf has stolen some money, and that being unable to replace it, and knowing that he would be ruined if the theft were discovered, he is endeavouring to conceal his identity."

"But he certainly couldn't have invented the accident, and you say he was picked up on the street in an insensible condition. Besides, what has he to hope for? The doctors won't keep him in the hospital indefinitely."

"No. There is already some talk of sending him to a lunatic asylum, I believe."

"In that case, he must indeed be mad to persist in concealing his identity. So your uncle's supposition—"

"Is absurd. I hope so; and I should perhaps agree with you if I did not remember what occurred here on the night of Monsieur Marbeuf's disappearance. Disappearance is really the word, for after that night no one was able to learn anything about his whereabouts—"

"I remember the matter, of course, but for all that, I fail to see—"

"Well, that evening when you came to my assistance in the street, you had just left Monsieur Marbeuf, had you not?"

"Yes, we had dined together, and separated on leaving the restaurant."

"But he was to return home in the course of the evening. You confidently expected that, didn't you?"

"Yes. In fact, I thought he would soon join me."

"And at midnight you were still waiting for him, and his prolonged absence so disturbed you that you were finally overcome with despair?"

"That is true. I feared that some misfortune had befallen him, and my presentiments did not deceive me, it seems."

"Be frank with me. It wasn't this fear alone that made you take up a revolver with the intention of blowing your brains out. A man doesn't kill himself because he is anxious about the fate of a friend." André did not know how to answer this reasoning of a girl of sixteen; besides, trying to convince him, Babiole had suggested several new theories. "You resolved to die," she continued, "because you did not receive some reply he was to bring you, and you said to yourself, 'No news is bad news'—the exact opposite of the proverb."

"What do you know of that?" muttered André, astonished at so much shrewdness.

"I may not have guessed exactly right," replied Babiole, "but I certainly am not far from the truth. Perhaps you had intrusted a large sum of money to your friend's keeping—"

This time André turned as pale as death. "You know very well that was even poorer, then, than I am at present," he stammered. "Beside even if I had intrusted a fortune to Marbeuf, the idea of his stealing would never have occurred to me."

"But you might have feared he had lost it. Pray believe me, Monsieur André, I am not trying to pry into your secrets. It is the last time I shall say anything to you about Monsieur Marbeuf; but if I could have had my way, I should have spoken to you about him much sooner. Yesterday, on leaving the hospital, my first impulse was to go and find you. I did not know your address, and I had great difficulty in finding you. When I did, I could not explain matters in presence of Monsieur Vernelle. I was afraid I might annoy you if I told this story in the presence of your future father-in-law."

"I am extremely grateful to you for your thoughtfulness."

"Then, when we left the house, the unexpected apparition of Monsieur Chantepie put me to flight. Besides, I relied upon seeing you this morning. Well, here you are, and now it is for you to decide what ought to be done respecting Monsieur Marbeuf. I could not assume the responsibility of revealing his identity. The comparative isolation in which I live, has taught me to be prudent, so I said nothing, not wishing to have any cause to reproach myself for having injured your friend—or yourself."

André could but admire the good sense and rare presence of mind which Babiole had displayed. He felt that she had done right in reporting the facts to him without delay, but, for all that, he was greatly perplexed. His heart revolted at the thought of leaving Marbeuf in his present deplorable position, and his first impulse was to hasten to the hospital, call his friend by name, and bring him to the Rue Lamartine immediately. But would Marbeuf recognise him, and if he did, what explanation could he give? Everything seemed to indicate that he had been attacked and

left for dead after the package of bank-notes had been stolen from him. But where had the poor fellow been thus attacked and plundered? Such an assault could hardly have occurred in the Rue Bergère at eight o'clock in the evening. It was possible, of course, that in his search for Monsieur Vernelle he might have been enticed into some gambling-den; or that, on his way to some railway station, he had fallen into the clutches of some of the thieves who prowl about the outlying quarters of Paris; but in that case, what possible interest could he now have in concealing his name and antecedents? It soon occurred to André that the story of the hundred thousand francs was only known to Chantepie and himself, and that Chantepie was certainly ignorant of the fact that Marbeuf had been in the Necker Hospital for more than a month: had he known it, he would certainly have warned his debtor and have urged him to take proceedings against Marbeuf.

The consequences of this strange discovery, therefore, depended entirely upon André. He had only to remain silent, after taking Marbeuf home. Babiole had just given conclusive evidence of her ability to keep a secret; and Dr. Valbrègue, who was merely interested in the case from a medical point of view, certainly would not trouble about the facts that had preceded it, but would content himself with watching his patient's gradual recovery.

"I understand your scruples, *mademoiselle*," said André, at last; "and I will assume the whole responsibility of the affair. Marbeuf has no cause to reproach himself, I am sure; and I will not let him remain in the hospital an hour longer than is absolutely necessary. You said bed Number Nineteen, in the Saint Ferdinand Ward, did you not?"

"Yes; but this is not visitors' day, so you will be refused admission."

"I shall apply to Dr. Valbrègue. He will grant me a permit."

"But you won't find him at the hospital. The hour for his round has passed by. He is only there in the morning, from nine till ten."

"But some of the hospital officials must be there."

"Yes; the assistant doctor that I saw, probably. Perhaps by telling him the object of your visit you could obtain a pass."

"I am sure of it."

"In fact, I shouldn't be surprised if he offered to accompany you to the patient's bedside, for he seems very anxious to establish Monsieur Marbeuf's identity. Still I don't believe that he will allow you to take your friend away with you. He will want to consult his superiors first."

"All the same, I shall try, and if I don't succeed, I shall endeavour to find Dr. Valbrègue."

"Have you thought of the sensation which Monsieur Marbeuf's unexpected return will create in the house? Our doorkeeper is convinced that he is dead, and she will take him for a ghost."

"That makes no difference to me."

"Yes, but she may go and inform the commissary of police."

"And why? Hasn't a tenant a right to absent himself if he chooses?"

"No doubt, but Monsieur Marbeuf disappeared very suddenly, and nothing has been heard of him for more than a month, so that government seals have been affixed to the doors of his apartment."

"But his furniture is still there."

"Yes; but it was to have been sold on the fifteenth of April."

"Ah, well, it won't be sold. Marbeuf will only have to report himself to the commissary to prevent that. He will have no difficulty in proving

that he is alive. In two hours' time from now I will have him here. Shall I find you at home on my return?"

"Certainly. The Boulevard Magenta isn't far off, and my interview with my employer won't be a lengthy one, so I shall soon be back again, and I won't go out afterwards. So it is settled," added Babiole. "You are going to claim your friend. Heaven grant that you may not have cause to repent of it!"

"I shall never repent of a good action," replied André. "Marbeuf owes his return to life to you. You have already saved Monsieur Verne and myself; and now there will be three persons with good cause to bless you."

"My interposition was all due to chance," replied Babiole, modestly. "Now, pray go at once, as your mind seems to be made up. If you delay, you may miss the assistant-doctor; besides, it is quite time for *me* to go out, if I want to find my employer at the shop. So good-bye, Monsieur André. Return as soon as you can. I shall be very glad to see you."

André shook hands with her very cordially, and had already reached the landing, when Babiole darted after him, and said: "I should be greatly obliged to you if you would not speak of me to the doctor, or my uncle either."

"You need have no fears of that, mademoiselle. Your name sha'n't be mixed up in the affair. I shall merely say that I have heard Monsieur Valbrègue speak of this singular case, and that I should like to see for myself if this famous Number Nineteen isn't a friend, whom I have been looking for during more than a month."

Babiole re-entered her little sitting-room, gloomy and pre-occupied. She now almost regretted her disclosures to André, for she augured no good from Marbeuf's reappearance. But she had done her duty, and, whatever the result might be, she would have no cause for self-reproach. She had to settle matters with her employer; and she had just put on her bonnet, when she heard someone knock at her door. As she did not expect any other visitor, she imagined that André had come back to ask for some further information, and she hastened to open the door. To her great astonishment, however, she found herself face to face with Madame Divet, whom the ascent of the stairs seemed to have reduced to the last stage of exhaustion. She was pulling like a porpoise, and drops of perspiration were trickling down her forehead. Babiole felt strongly inclined to shut the door in her face, but really pitying her sad plight, she finally stepped aside, and allowed her to enter. Moreover, this unexpected visit would make the trip to the Boulevard Magenta unnecessary, and enable the young girl to sever the connection at once.

Madame Divet sank into a chair, which groaned under her weight, and then she exclaimed: "Well, well, you certainly roost in the air. Nothing but my sincere regard for you could ever have induced me to attempt such a climb."

"I regret that you have given yourself so much trouble, madame," rejoined Babiole, who was determined to remain perfectly polite. "I was just starting for your house. In fact, I should have been there before now, if—"

"If you hadn't received a visit from your lover."

"You know perfectly well that I have no lover, madame."

"Nonsense! didn't I just meet him on the stairs! He was rushing down at such a rate that he didn't notice me—and I was glad of it—but I

recognised him. It was the same young fellow who offered you his arm on Saturday evening. Ha, ha! you are behaving nicely for a pink of propriety! And to think that I have held you up as a model for all the other girls! I certainly should never have believed such a thing of you!"

"I haven't the slightest idea what you mean, madame."

"Don't pretend innocence, my dear. That won't go down with me. That young man escorted you home on the night before last, and I met him again this morning, coming out of your apartments, after, evidently, paying you a visit. You can't convince me that you spent all your time together talking politics."

"Such insinuations are unworthy of you, madame," exclaimed poor Babiole, ready to cry with vexation, "and if it was to say such things that you came here—"

"Oh no, I didn't come to preach!" said Madame Divet, who, having recovered her breath, began to perceive that she was following the wrong tack. "Of course, you have a perfect right to do as you like, and in one sense, you certainly haven't made a bad choice. He is a handsome fellow, and really has quite a distinguished air, but I would willingly bet, almost any amount, that he hasn't a penny. You may love him very much, but you really ought to think of your future. You were not born to live in an attic and wear cheap dresses, and this bean of yours will never be able to buy you any diamonds, you may be sure of it."

"Enough, madame, I will listen to no more such talk. I had already decided not to remain any longer in your employ, and now, I must beg of you to leave the house."

"Come, come, Babiole. You mustn't be angry, my child. I see you are offended with me because I introduced you to that brute of a Bertaud. I admit I was wrong. He is old and ugly, and stingy into the bargain. Well, forget all about him—but do you know that you have made a deep impression on a real noble man—a prince, worth, I don't know how many millions, and who would be happy to lay his heart and fortune at your feet."

"I was expecting to hear something like that," said Babiole, coldly.

"Indeed! Well, that is a good sign.—Yes; you have seen the prince I refer to; you met him yesterday at the Baroness d'Orbec's, and you made such an impression on his heart that he will kill himself if you refuse him an opportunity to press his suit. Oh! he only wishes to make your acquaintance, and wants you and I to breakfast with him at the Café Anglais. He is really a great lord, not in the least like Bertaud, who groans over every penny he is obliged to spend—"

"Madame," interrupted Babiole. "I have allowed you to talk because I wished to see how far your audacity would go. But I must now beg of you to listen to me attentively, for this conversation will be the last we shall ever have together."

"Oh, we'll see about that; but pray proceed, child. Say all you have to say, I will answer you afterwards."

"When my uncle placed me in your establishment, do you think, madame, that he supposed you would ever give me such advice as this? You know very well that he took you for a respectable woman. Had he been aware of your true character, he would never have intrusted me to your charge. But he knows you now—"

"What! have you told him?"

"What you did on Saturday? Yes, madame; and he has forbidden me

ever to set foot in your house again. He is going to find me a situation some other establishment, and if I told him that you have repeated your attempts, he would not hesitate to denounce you to the authorities."

"You won't play me such a trick as to tell him, I hope?"

"If you will let me alone in future, I will be silent; but you must never come to me with any more infamous proposals, madame. Remember this! There is a bonnet which the Baroness d'Orbec rejected; please take it, and pray tell your prince that if he ever dares to come here, he will have good cause to repent it."

"You mean, I suppose, that your lover will give him a warm reception?"

"Will you never have done insulting me? I feel strongly tempted to have you turned out of the house; but to prevent you from slandering me to your friends, I prefer to tell you that the young man you speak of is no degree my lover, and that he is to be married in a few days' time to a young lady of my acquaintance."

"Your acquaintance? What young ladies do you know, pray? What is this one's name?"

"She is the daughter of a well-known banker; and is named Mademoiselle Clémence Vernelle."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Madame Divet, with an air of mingled astonishment and incredulity.

"It is quite true, madame. He was at the Opéra Comique with her the other evening, in the same box as her father."

"I remember now. You certainly looked at him enough. The banker lives in the Rue Bergère, doesn't he?"

"Yes, and this young man is his private secretary."

"Then how under the sun did you become acquainted with him?"

"He stayed here a short time with one of his friends who lived in this house; but I had not seen him for more than a month, when he came to my help on the night before last."

"But you have probably made up for lost time since?"

"Enough!" cried Babiole, angrily. "I spent part of the day yesterday with my uncle, and afterwards I went to the house of your customer, that baroness, in the Rue Galilée."

"You may have met the young man there—who knows?"

"I did meet him there, and he told me just now that it was Monsieur Vernelle who had sent him."

"I know why."

"I don't, and I don't care to know."

"But I'll tell you, all the same. It will only serve the baroness right for deceiving me. If she had given me any hint of what was going on, I wouldn't have said a word to you. But I now understand why she is going away. She told me to-day that she thought of spending the winter in Italy. Your young friend was sent to her by his prospective father-in-law to request her to take herself off before the marriage. She must have made the Vernelles pay her a big price, especially as they can't dispense with her consent. Yolande has a very good idea of the value of things. But you don't understand me, I see. Well, then, to speak plainly, the Baroness d'Orbec is the lawful wife of Monsieur Vernelle, and the no less lawful mother of your friend's betrothed."

"What are you saying?" exclaimed Babiole, in astonishment.

"Only the truth, my dear. I have known Yolande for fifteen years, and I rendered her many valuable services before she left her fool of a

husband. She had no secrets from me in those days. Your young friend can't be hard to please, as he has accepted such a woman as his mother-in-law. Pray, what is this very liberal-minded young man's name?"

"André Subligny."

"Subligny, did you say? Subligny! Impossible. You must be mistaken." Madame Divet had abruptly risen, and the expression of her face had entirely changed.

"No, madame, I am not mistaken," said Babiole, as greatly astonished as her employer, although not for the same reason. "The young man you saw is certainly named André Subligny."

"Is he the son of Monsieur Charles Subligny—a shipping merchant of Havre?"

"He certainly came from Havre, and I think that his father was a ship-owner."

"Was? Is his father dead then?"

"Yes, madame. He died a ruined man. Monsieur André now only has his mother, who lives in Normandy. It was she who sent him to Paris with a letter of recommendation to Monsieur Vernelle."

"That explains it. She never had any knowledge of the affair," muttered Madame Divet. "and her son is equally ignorant of the truth." Then turning to Babiole again, she added: "And is it since his interview with the baroness that the young man told you that he expected to be married at an early date?"

"I heard it first yesterday. He repeated the announcement this morning."

"So he must have obtained Yolande's consent. I never had a very exalted opinion of her, but I really did not think her capable of going as far as this."

"Excuse me, madame," said Babiole, "but you are talking in enigmas—enigmas which I haven't the slightest desire to solve. You have certainly said all you can possibly have to say to me; and I have said all I have to say in reply. Our conversation being over, you can't take it amiss if I request you to leave me."

Madame Divet did not seem inclined to comply with Babiole's request. Indeed, instead of taking up the bonnet rejected by the baroness, and starting for the door, she began to walk up and down the room, gesticulating excitedly, and muttering incoherent words. Suddenly pausing in her promenade, just in front of Babiole, who was beginning to think she had gone mad, she said to her point-blank: "Would you like me to furnish you with the means of preventing your lover from marrying his employer's daughter?"

"Monsieur Subligny is my friend, but not my lover," replied Babiole, firmly. "He is betrothed to Mademoiselle Vernelle, who loves him, and whom he loves in return. Why should I prevent him from being happy?"

"You are very generous, child. Whatever your connection with this young man may be, I don't believe that he is indifferent to you. Confess, now, that if he had courted you, you wouldn't have refused to become his wife?"

Babiole blushed deeply, but answered never a word; and her face gave no indication of what her real feelings might be.

"He preferred the banker's daughter to you, because she will be very rich," added Madame Divet.

"You are very much mistaken; Monsieur Vernelle is a bankrupt."

"You astonish me. But, no matter, his wife is rolling in money. G. is almost the only thing to which no unsavoury odour clings; and it is because he relies upon receiving a handsome dowry with his bride that he is going to marry her."

"I am sure that the ideas you impute to him never once entered mind," retorted Babiole, indignantly.

"I am satisfied now that you are in love with this young man, and don't blame you, for he is exceedingly handsome. You would certainly be very foolish to marry another when you have only to say the word to make this marriage an impossibility."

"I hope it will take place," responded Babiole, firmly. "I wish it could be solemnised to-morrow; still, if Monsieur Subligny did not know that his affianced wife was the daughter of the pretended Baroness d'Orbec, I should feel it my duty to inform him. But he is perfectly well aware of the fact, as he called to see her yesterday to ask her consent. So he knows Mademoiselle Vernelle's exact position, and persists in his suit. Then there isn't the slightest reason why I should interfere, and I should not reproach myself all my life if I did anything to mar his happiness."

"Babiole, I really admire you. Your generosity amounts to positive heroism. But you are making a very great mistake. Besides, even if I allowed you to do this, you would sacrifice yourself for nothing, and you and André would only be the loser. It isn't a question of destroying his happiness by preventing his marriage, but of saving him from a terrible misfortune." The young girl was becoming more and more mystified. "Yes, terrible misfortune," repeated Madame Divet, earnestly; "the greatest that could possibly befall a husband and his wife. You must warn them or rather warn him, as it is in him that you are most deeply interested."

"Why don't you warn him yourself?"

"Excuse me, but I don't take the slightest interest in him; besides, I don't want to meddle with Yolande's affairs. She might take offence, she has given her consent to this marriage; and as I have never had any cause to complain of her, I ought not to harm her. With you, however, it is very different. You are under no obligations to her."

"Oh, no, and I certainly hope I may never hear her name again. But you advise me to warn Monsieur André—warn him of what?"

"Listen, Babiole, I have great confidence in you, but I cannot go into particulars; nor can I explain matters except by stating a parallel case. Suppose that one of your friends—one of your relatives, if you like—was about to marry a woman supposing her to be a spinster or a widow, and that you learnt by chance that this woman was already married, and that her husband was living, what would you do? Would you allow the unfortunate man to marry her?"

"Certainly not, if I had proofs of the fact; but if I hadn't, I should be afraid of making a mistake. But what similarity can there be between this and Mademoiselle Vernelle's case? You don't pretend, I suppose, that she is already married, and that she is in league with her father to deceive the man she loves?"

"Mademoiselle Vernelle knows nothing at all about this, nor does her father, but the facts are somewhat similar all the same. Indeed, I assure you that if Monsieur Subligny marries Mademoiselle Vernelle, his position will be worse than that of a criminal. He might be ignorant of it, but there would be plenty of persons to tell him the truth after the misfortune became irreparable."

"You would be one of these persons, perhaps?"

"No, I am not in the least spiteful. I should say nothing; but I am not the only person who knows the secret. Your friend would die of grief, and his wife, too."

"And yet you hesitate to confide the secret to me. You point out the danger, but don't furnish me with the means of averting it."

"Child, I might say that you have just treated me in a manner that releases me from any obligation towards you. But I never bear malice, and what you said won't prevent me from doing the young man you love so well a service. But the difficulty is this. You have just told me that there must be proofs in such a case, and that is quite true. Well, I can supply proofs—written proofs—and I will hand them to you if you will come to my house—"

"Never!"

"What a simpleton you are, my poor Babiole! Do you imagine that the prince is lying in wait for you in my work-room, like a spider lies in wait for a fly? I think too much of my reputation to allow any such goings on in my establishment. What I said to you was solely prompted by my interest in your welfare. You don't believe me, so let us say no more about the matter. I will let the prince know that you don't care to make his acquaintance, and you can accompany me to my house on the Boulevard Magenta, with perfect safety. I have a cab at the door, and there is a letter that will tell you all that you wish to know, in my desk at home. I will give it to you: you can read it, and afterwards do exactly what you think proper. I can safely promise that you will be at home again in an hour's time, unless you prefer to run after Monsieur André, and show him the letter, and that wouldn't be a bad idea, for he has no time to lose—he is on the brink of a precipice."

"Then it is a letter that will furnish the necessary proofs—a letter from whom?"

"No matter who wrote it; you must see it to understand the situation; and if you won't take the trouble to come with me, well, I shall burn it as soon as I get home—so much the worse for Monsieur André."

This announcement alarmed Babiole. Her employer spoke with so much earnestness that it really seemed as if she spoke the truth in declaring that André was in danger, and that Babiole alone could save him; and such being the case, she decided to endure another hour of Madame Divet's company, even if she did run some risk in doing so. "If I should consent to accompany you, will you allow me to bring the letter away with me?" she asked.

"Certainly; if I intended to keep it, it would not be worth while for me to show it to you. Your friend must see it. He will no doubt recognise the handwriting. Come, child, make up your mind."

Babiole hesitated an instant longer. "To whom was the letter addressed?" she inquired at last.

"How persistent you are! I begin to think that you are only jesting with me, or else trying to find out all you can, and then leave me in the lurch. I shall tell you nothing more. I have told you enough, and more than enough already. After all, I take no interest in your André, and I see no reason why I should do him a favour at the risk of getting myself into trouble with a person whose good-will it is well worth my while to retain. "Are you coming, yes or no?"

"Yes," said Babiole, who reflected that she had really nothing to fear in a millinery shop on the Boulevard Magenta, in broad daylight.

"That's proper!" exclaimed Madame Divet. "I am glad you have ceased to regard me as an ogress. Have no fears, child. No one will hurt you; and if you see your light-haired friend again to-day, you can open your eyes to his danger. Take the baroness's rejected bonnet, and let us be off."

Babiole was already dressed to go, so she picked up the band-box, followed her employer down-stairs, first locking the door of her apartment. As she passed out, the doorkeeper who held her in high esteem, called out: "One minute, Mam'zelle Babois!" For she always addressed her by her real name—the same that figured on the rent-bills, which were always promptly paid by Babiole on the day they fell due.

"What is the matter, Madame Hippolyte?"

"Wasn't the light-complexioned gentleman who called just now, the person who spent a night with poor Monsieur Marbeuf?"

"Yes, Madame Hippolyte; and if he calls again before I return, please tell him that I shan't be gone long, and ask him to wait for me."

"I won't fail to do so. Is he likely to bring you any news of his friend?"

"I hope so."

"Well, it will come none too soon. Rent day falls next month."

Babiole felt no inclination to prolong the conversation. She already regretted having said so much, for Madame Divet had paused, probably to listen. And she must have overheard the dialogue, for she asked: "Is it possible that you expect to see your André again this morning?"

"Yes, madame; and if he does not find me at home he will be anxious to know what has become of me," was the quick response.

"Still another thrust at me. You seem to imagine that I want to kidnap you. You need have no fears. I will return you to young Sublet safe and sound. And, by the way, how fortunate it is that you are to see him again to-day! You will have an opportunity to inform him of his danger without delay."

Babiole made no reply. A cab was at the door. The girl entered it, with Madame Divet, and they drove together towards the Boulevard Magenta. But few words were exchanged during their drive, which lasted barely a quarter of an hour. As they reached their destination, and while Madame Divet was settling with the cabman, Babiole said to herself: "It is surprising that that stylish baroness should purchase her bonnets in this unfashionable neighbourhood. It is probably because she dealt with Madame Divet in former years—when she was Madame Vernelle."

"I have sent the cab away," said Madame Divet, now turning to the young girl. "You can go home on foot. It is only a short distance, and the weather's fine."

"Nothing could please me better," exclaimed Babiole, dismissing her last lingering feeling of distrust. For when you walk, you can go wherever you like, while you do not always know where a vehicle may take you.

After passing through the work-room where two young milliners smiled at Babiole, whom they liked very well, though they were a little jealous of her on account of the privileges she enjoyed in the establishment, Madame Divet ushered her companion into a small and very prettily furnished room where customers of distinction usually tried on their bonnets. "Sit down, my dear," said the fat woman. "The letters are in my bed-room. I will go and get them. It isn't worth while for you to accompany me. I shall be back in a moment."

Babiole felt considerably relieved to find that she was not expected to go beyond this little room, which was open to all customers. She felt qu

safe there. Indeed, there was nothing alarming about Madame Divet's actions; and the young girl almost reproached herself for her earlier distrust. At least ten minutes elapsed before her employer returned, holding in her hand a packet of letters tied together with a pink ribbon. "I have kept you waiting, but it was not my fault," she said, gaily. "I have been the custodian of these letters so long, and had so carefully hidden them away that I had some difficulty in finding them; but here they are at last. You see that I am a woman of my word, and that you do very wrong to distrust me. I assure you that if you hadn't come here, I should have allowed that young man to put his head in the noose unhindered, if only to punish you for your unjust suspicions. Come, now, let us see. It is not necessary for you to wade through all this rubbish. You would have to spend the day here, if you did; besides, I don't care to give you the entire correspondence. One never knows what may happen. I will pick out the letter I referred to, and you can take it away with you when you have read it."

A moment later Madame Divet handed one of the notes to Babiole who began to peruse it attentively. It was apparently a love letter, and its impassioned language made the young girl blush. "Who wrote this?" she suddenly asked; "it begins 'My dear Yolande,' and is signed 'Charles.'"

"Why, it was written to Madame Vernelle, by your friend André's father," retorted Madame Divet. "Have you remarked those allusions to 'our daughter, Clemence,' and do you understand the situation now?"

"Good heavens! How dreadful!" cried Babiole in dismay. "Yes! Ah, you have certainly rendered Monsieur Subligny a great service. Mademoiselle Vernelle is Monsieur Vernelle's daughter only in name. Monsieur André could never marry her! It would be too terrible. But what a base woman Madame Vernelle must be! She not only deceived her husband, but she has apparently consented to this marriage."

"Well, my dear, I hope that you are no longer angry with me for insisting on your coming here," resumed Madame Divet. "You must admit that I was actuated only by the kindest of motives. Thanks to me, you will be able to save two young people who are walking with closed eyes upon the verge of a frightful precipice, to say nothing of the fact that your André will be deeply grateful to you, and that, by-and-bye, after he has recovered from the shock, he will discover, I am sure, that you are ten times prettier than Mademoiselle Vernelle; and as you are so thoroughly conscientious, and quite as attractive and stylish as any fashionable young lady, I see no reason why he shouldn't marry you. He is not such a great aristocrat, after all. His father was only a plain business man, and so, indeed, is he."

This suggestion, perhaps, harmonized with Babiole's secret hopes; but she gave no sign that such was the case. Having folded the letter into a small compass, she had placed it in her purse, and her chief desire now was to get away, for she wished to reach home before André returned from the hospital.

"I will detain you no longer, my child," continued Madame Divet, "but I cannot let you go without drinking to our reconciliation. I want you to taste my ratatouille—the same we took on my last birthday."

Babiole was terribly thirsty; her lips were parched, and her throat seemed on fire from excitement and emotion, so she replied: "I will take a few drops in a glass of water."

"Just as you please. I shall take mine unadulterated, however. Wait a second, I will bring it to you."

Madame Divet again disappeared, but returned almost immediately with a tray on which stood a bottle and two glasses—a large one which she offered to her visitor, and a small one intended for herself. Babiole emptied hers at a single draught, while Madame Divet sipped her own with allowance. "It is delicious," she murmured. "It cheers my heart, and I had need of it, for—though you may not believe me—I really feel so when I think of the grief and consternation this letter is sure to cause. Be careful not to lose it."

The liquor, which was having such a beneficial effect upon Madame Divet, only increased Babiole's feeling of discomfort. The poor child had not sooner drained her glass than she began to experience a feeling of utter bewilderment. She passed her hand over her forehead, and she was obliged to lean back in her chair to keep from falling. "What is the matter with you, my dear?" inquired Madame Divet, with great apparent solicitude.

"I don't feel well," replied Babiole, "and my eyes will close in spite of all my efforts to keep them open. I feel as if I wanted to sleep."

"Lie down a few moments. Come, I will support you. Try to walk to the sofa, where you can rest awhile. When you have had a nap you will feel much better."

"No; I must—return home. I want—a cab."

"You cannot stand alone. Sleep a bit. I will wake you in an hour and take you back to the Rue Lamartine."

"No—André. I must see him! He will be there."

"What of that? He isn't going to be married to-morrow. You will have plenty of opportunities to see him." So saying, Madame Divet passed her strong arm about Babiole's waist, and carried, rather than led, her toward the sofa.

The young girl stretched herself upon it, murmuring André's name, and almost immediately afterwards she became entirely unconscious of what was passing around her. Madame Divet, who seemed to have had experience in such cases, felt Babiole's pulse, and bent over her to listen to her light breathing; then reassured, no doubt, concerning the potency of her cordial, she arranged the folds of the girl's dress, crossed her hands upon her breast, and hastened into the adjoining room. A man was waiting there—a respectable-looking, well-dressed man, with a smooth-shaven face—a man who looked very much like the majordomo of a palace establishment. "It is all right," she said to him. "The girl is asleep and won't wake up for twelve hours or more. But I can't keep her here a moment longer. The brougham is waiting in the little street, you said?"

"Quite so," replied the man, with a strong German accent.

"Very well; I will wrap her in a shawl, and you must carry her to the carriage. She isn't heavy, and you know the way."

"Perfectly, madame. Here is your one-thousand-franc note. Now where is the young lady?"

Madame Divet pocketed the money, and then said: "We must first come to an understanding, however. What I have done was done to oblige the baroness, rather than for the sake of money, and I must not be compromised. The prince, whom I saw this morning, promised me that he would act as a gentleman. You are to take the girl to the house he has leased near the Parc Monceau, but mind she mustn't be forcibly detained there. No violence, pray. Please remind the prince that he isn't in Russia, and that he will go straight to the assizes, if he ventures to treat the girl. Do you understand?"

"Clearly," responded the majordomo, whose knowledge of the French language seemed to be confined to its adverbs.

"Then follow me." As she spoke, Madame Divet ushered him into the adjoining room, enveloped Babiole—still unconscious—in a large Scotch plaid, and the man then lifted her in his arms, and bore her from the room.

The house stood at the corner of the Boulevard Magenta, and the Rue des Petits-Hôtels, and had two doors—one communicating with the boulevard, and the other with the side-street, where a vehicle was waiting. Babiole was placed in it, the man sprang upon the box, and the coachman drove off at a brisk trot. André's destiny again depended upon the brave girl who had already once saved him.

IX.

WHILE Babiole, trusting to Madame Divet's promise, was leaving the Rue Lamartine, André Subligny was hastening towards the Necker Hospital. He was not to see M. Vernelle again before dinner-time; so the best use he could make of his day's leave was to extricate his friend from the unpleasant position in which he found himself. "One of two things must be true," thought Subligny, "either Marbeuf has no cause to reproach himself, or, on the contrary, he has betrayed my confidence; but, in either case, I must interfere as soon as possible, for, if he isn't guilty, it would be inhuman not to go to his aid; and if he is guilty, it is to my interest to secure his release before his identity is discovered. I will then question him myself, and after his confession I will take such precautions as will keep his accident a secret from everyone, for I was the real cause of it, as I intrusted him with the money which he perhaps lost, unless, indeed, it was stolen from him."

He had no time to lose. Uncle Auguste had promised his niece that he would say nothing upon the subject before the following Thursday. Still, he might yield to the persuasions of the assistant doctor, whose suspicions were already aroused, and make disclosures which would certainly involve Babiole in the affair—a consummation which Subligny earnestly desired to avoid. He reached the hospital between twelve and one o'clock, a most unfortunate time, as this was not visiting day. The chief doctor is very seldom there at that hour, and it not unfrequently happens that his subordinates embrace this opportunity to enjoy a cigar on the Boulevard Montparnasse. However, André fully expected to encounter obstacles; and was resolved to succeed in his undertaking in spite of them. The doorkeeper began by informing him that no visitor could enter the wards without a written permit from the director, and that the director was now absent; whereupon André, who was prepared for the announcement, asked leave to speak to Dr. Valbrègue, or to one of his assistants.

Dr. Valbrègue would be at the hospital at one o'clock to perform a post-mortem examination, but he had not yet arrived. M. Bose, the assistant doctor, had not finished his breakfast, and the porter did not care to disturb him, at least not without good cause. Subligny thereupon decided to say that he had come to give the doctor some information concerning a patient in the Saint Ferdinand Ward—a patient whose name the officers of the institution had not succeeded in discovering—and the doorkeeper, mistaking the young secretary for a member of the police force, thereupon ad-

mitted him, placing him in charge of a messenger who happened to within call at the time. André was well satisfied with this result, and cheerfully followed his guide, who conducted him to the room where Bosc and Babiole had had their interview together. "Monsieur Bosc, here is some one who wants to see you," said the messenger as he ushered André into the apartment.

André found himself enveloped in a cloud of smoke which choked and nearly blinded him—a cloud of smoke produced by the tobacco in half a dozen pipes and also by some green wood burning in a stove. The smoke seemed to be such imminent danger of suffocation, that André paused upon the threshold in dismay. The gentlemen present—six in number—were sipping their coffee, flavoured with a dash of brandy, and served Madame Colas, who was grumbling because one of the party had declared that she had given them nothing but chicory. Whom should André address? he was considerably in doubt.

"What do you want?" gruffly asked one of the fellows, a rather shabbily dressed and unkempt-looking giant.

"I wish to see the assistant doctor of the Saint Ferdinand Ward," replied Subligny, between two fits of coughing.

"To inquire concerning the ailments of the patients about whom you will be questioned at your next examination?"

"Excuse me, I am not a medical student, and—"

"Then admission here is forbidden."

"I have a personal matter to discuss with Monsieur —— Monsieur——"

"Bosc—you don't even seem to know his name."

"That is very true," replied André, annoyed by this reception, "but Dr. Valbrègue knows me; and if he were at the hospital I shouldn't be subjected to treatment of this kind."

The name of Valbrègue produced a marked effect. The inquirer became silent, and Bosc, who had been concealed from view by the stove, now rose and approached the visitor.

"In what way can I be of service to you?" he asked, raising his eyes politely.

"I should like to have a private conversation with you."

"If the interview is likely to be a long one, I haven't time just now."

"It is in reference to Number Nineteen," said André, lowering his voice.

"That is very different. I am at your service, sir. But we have no parlour. The administration has neglected to provide us with one. If you don't object, we can talk on the staircase."

"It is immaterial to me what place you select."

The assistant doctor led the way on to the landing—the same spot where he had accosted Babiole on the day before. "Excuse the rather rude reception my comrade gave you," he said. "We are continually besieged by simpletons who come to ask our assistance in preparing for their examinations. But I don't see how he could have mistaken you for a student. You don't look like one in the least. So it is about Number Nineteen that you wish to see me? Do you know him?"

"I think so."

"But you have not been here to see him since he entered the hospital."

"No; but a person who was here yesterday described him to me, and the description corresponds perfectly with that of one of my friends. The lady may be mistaken, but I should like to see your patient myself."

"That is a very easy matter. But isn't the person to whom you refer a very pretty girl who has an uncle here?"

"Yes, sir. But why did you think so?"

"Ah! that girl is sharp. She certainly played a fine trick on me. Would you believe it, I was in the ward during her visit, and by the way in which she looked at our celebrated Number Nineteen, I suspected that she knew who he was. And the uncle, too, must know him, for I saw them whispering together. Now, as Dr. Valbrègue was anxious to discover who this patient was, I stopped the niece on the stairs, and although she finally consented to step into the room there, I could extort no information from her, though I plied her with questions. But now you have come to solve the mystery for us. Valbrègue will be delighted. But why the deuce did the girl refuse to enlighten us?"

"I think she wasn't quite sure of the patient's identity. She had met him a few times, but had never spoken to him."

"Nor did she yesterday. It was the uncle who did all the talking. Number Nineteen told me, however, that he thought he had seen the girl somewhere, though he could not recollect where. He remembers nothing. It is a remarkable case of complete obliteration of memory. We can now make a very interesting experiment. Will he awake from his mental lethargy on finding himself face to face with you? That is the question. I hardly know how it is best to proceed."

"If you will be kind enough to take me to him—"

"Oh, certainly, and at once. I think, too, that it will be better not to prepare him for your visit. Are you a relative of his?"

"No, sir. I am only a friend, but a very intimate friend. I was staying with him at the time of his disappearance."

"Good! We shall not only find out now who he is, but what happened to him. Would you believe it, we are not yet satisfied as regards the nature of the accident which befell him? Valbrègue declares that his condition is the result of a fall."

"I am quite as much in the dark about the accident as you are. He is not quarrelsome, and he is very temperate in his habits."

Still, he may have taken a drop too much, just for once. But we are wasting time talking here when we have only to see for ourselves. Let us go upstairs, if you please."

The assistant knocked the ashes from his pipe, placed it in his pocket, and led the way to the floor above. "Pass in front, and walk on ahead, so that he will not see me," said Bosc, when they had reached the ward. "Number Nineteen has the last bed on the left-hand side. Go straight to it, and speak to him boldly. It is possible, however, that he isn't there, and in that case, we shall have to look for him in the garden."

André hesitated an instant. He had never before been in a hospital, and the sight greatly impressed him. "And it is here that Marheuf has lived for more than a month!" he said to himself, "and if he had died, his poor body would have gone straight from the dissecting table to the pauper's grave."

"What can you expect?" said the assistant, reading his companion's thoughts. "It is not a very cheerful sight, certainly, but it might be worse. Step inside. The patients are looking at us."

André obeyed, walking cautiously, and even holding his breath, for it seemed to him that the eyes of all the patients were fixed upon him. The assistant followed, pausing occasionally to address a word of encouragement.

to some poor wretch who knew that there was no hope left for him, or give an order to one of the nurses.

On reaching the further end of the room, André found the bed empty and turned to consult his guide, who at once rejoined him, asking Babiole's uncle: "Number Nineteen has gone down into the garden, he not?"

"He went down about a quarter-of-an-hour after breakfast," replied old Auguste, drily.

Almost at the same moment, a nurse who had just entered the ward approached the assistant doctor, and said: "Monsieur Bosc, Dr. Valbrègue has arrived, and wishes to see you in the dissecting-room."

"Very well, I will be there in a moment."

André could not repress a shudder on hearing those ominous words, "dissecting-room." The nurse had spoken them just as he would have said, "The doctor is waiting for you in the dining-room."

"If you continue to improve at this rate," continued Bosc, addressing Uncle Auguste, "it won't be worth while for your niece to come to see you again, for you will be able to leave the hospital by the end of the week."

"You needn't trouble yourself about my niece," growled Number Twenty.

"I know that, of course; but I am sure you won't be sorry to hear from her; and this gentleman can give you news of her." Then noticing that the patient was scrutinizing André with a far from benevolent air, he added, mischievously: "This gentleman saw her this morning, and spoke to him about Number Nineteen. It seems that she knows him. You pretend the contrary?"

"It is possible she may know him, but she isn't obliged to tell you so she does, nor am I. I am no detective."

"You needn't be angry about it. This gentleman is a friend of Number Nineteen's, and your niece certainly had a perfect right to tell him about your opposite neighbour. The gentleman has come to identify him, and poor Number Nineteen will at last be restored to his friends."

"So much the better for him. But I should like very much to know how this gentleman became acquainted with my niece."

"I lived for a few days in the same house as she does," replied André, "and next Thursday she herself will explain to you why she applied to me in this matter."

"I hope so, I'm sure," said the uncle sullenly.

"But, in the meantime, you must not allow yourself to get excited," added the assistant. "Quiet will do you more good than any medicine."

As he spoke he nudged André, who understood and beat a retreat, for he did not care to enter into an explanation, which might bring about a quarrel between Babiole and her irritable uncle. When they were safely out of the ward, Bosc laughingly remarked: "The old fellow thinks you are the great lover."

"If he does he is very much mistaken."

"I am sorry for you, then, for she is charming. But to return to the subject, Valbrègue has arrived, and I am going to take you to him. I would not like it if I proceeded in this matter without consulting him, especially as he is particularly anxious to observe the phenomena attending upon the return of memory, which will, I hope, take place when our patient sees you. Will it be sudden or gradual, however? We cannot tell, and it will be a very interesting change to watch."

"I should be very glad to see Monsieur Valbrègue," began André, "but—"

"But what? Oh! I understand, you are nervous, and you don't want to see the bodies. I can understand that. It is a repulsive sight when one is not used to it. But don't be alarmed, Dr. Valbrègue has only just arrived, and he hasn't yet had time to begin work. As soon as he earns the object of your visit, he will leave his autopsy, in which he is much less interested than in Number Nineteen. Come with me. We shall only have to step in and step out, for he is too much of a gentleman to detain you long in such a disagreeable place; and he will go with us in search of Number Nineteen, I am sure of it."

André made no further objections. He did not want the assistant doctor to take him for a weak, effeminate fellow, and besides he was anxious to confer with Dr. Valbrègue, who held Marbeuf's fate in his hands. The chief doctor would know him from having seen him at M. Vernelle's house. So he could present himself with all confidence although greatly embarrassed on account of the position in which he was placed in regard to Marbeuf. It was impossible for him to tell the whole truth to the doctor; and yet the latter would hardly fail to question him respecting the probable cause of Marbeuf's disappearance. The assistant doctor, after descending the stairs, turned into a covered gallery which bordered one side of a courtyard as gloomy and as desolate as that of a prison, and which led to a pavilion annexed to one of the main buildings. Midway they met a girl about eighteen years of age, clad neither like the patients nor the nurses, but who was by no means ugly with her tiptilted nose, bright eyes, laughing mouth and profusion of curling chestnut hair. "Good morning, Monsieur Bosc," she said as she passed, "Dr. Valbrègue is waiting for you."

"Has he begun the autopsy?"

"No, not yet. The dissector has not come. The doctor is talking with my father, who complains that the rats spoil his subjects. Last night they nearly devoured a woman, worth at least thirty francs."

"He ought to set some traps for them."

"The director won't buy any. He is so mean."

"Then your father ought to have a safe. Are you going to breakfast? A good appetite, Miss Scarifier."

As André listened to this dialogue, he grew cold to the very marrow of his bones. "You are not accustomed to this sort of thing," remarked his companion, laughing. "That young girl was not reared in the lap of luxury. Her mother is one of the nurses, and her father assists in the dissecting-room and scarifies our patients. You know what I mean—he applies the cupping vessels, and so we call his daughter Miss Scarifier."

André understood only too well. But it was worse when Bosc conducted him through a brightly lighted room, where five lifeless bodies lay extended upon as many zinc-covered tables. There was a possibility that these bodies would be claimed by relatives; if not, they would be sent to the dead-house in the Rue du Fer-à-Moulin, where they would be labelled like so many pieces of merchandise, and where the students who had entered upon the third year of their medical studies could select them. One fellow may need a consumptive, another a cancerous subject, and he makes his mark upon the arm or hip of the one he chooses, which is ultimately handed over to him. In this room a strong scent of carbolic acid mingled with the overpowering, nauseating odour of decomposition. A cat, which did not perform her duties as a rat-catcher very faithfully, at least, according to

the young girl before alluded to, was lapping some milk from a porringer. And this dreary apartment was only the ante-chamber of the room reserved for the *post-mortem* examinations. In the latter the only furniture consisted of six stone tables, with brass taps above them, and several troupes filled with chloride of lime. Upon one of the tables lay the subject Valbrègue desired to dissect in order to discover the cause of death, and nearby stood the doctor, quietly talking with the "scarifier."

The doctor had already donned his apron, and André had some difficulty in recognizing the fashionable physician he had met at M. Vernelle's a few mornings before. Dr. Valbrègue, on the contrary, recognized the young secretary at the first glance, and dismissing his subordinate, who was anathematizing the rats, he came straight towards André, and inquired with much apparent interest: "Is Monsieur Vernelle worse?"

"No, sir," stammered Subligny, who could scarcely speak, so greatly did the surroundings disgust him. "I did not come at the request of Monsieur Vernelle."

"I saw him last evening, and I arrived in time, thanks to the zeal of the assistants displayed in warning me of the result of the analysis, for you are probably aware that, under pretext of carrying out my directions, a strong dose of one of the most violent poisons known was administered to your employer twice a day."

"I am aware of it, sir, but—"

"Do you know at whose instigation this was done?" André made reply, "I understand your reluctance to accuse anyone," resumed the doctor. "It is too grave a matter. Monsieur Vernelle himself begged to keep the affair a secret. I consented to do so, but only for the present, however. The druggist, whom I have already questioned on the subject, declares that he made up the prescription himself, and sent it to Monsieur Vernelle's house by a trusty messenger, who delivered the package into the hands of the doorkeeper. The investigation can be conducted quietly, there must be one. Tell me, however, is it really true that Monsieur Vernelle is a ruined man? I did not dare to question him about his affairs."

"The report is only too true, unfortunately."

"I am truly sorry to hear it, for I both like and respect him. Tell me that I sincerely sympathize with him in his reverses, and that I am entirely at his service if I can assist him in any way. But what is the matter with you, my dear sir? You are very pale, and—"

The assistant doctor made a gesture in the direction of the body which Subligny was trying his best not to see. "Ah! I understand," said Valbrègue, "you are not accustomed to such ghastly sights. I won't intrude upon you any longer. Let us step into the next room."

André supposed he would be obliged to pass through the dead-room again, but Dr. Valbrègue opened a door which the young man had not noticed before, and which led into an apartment of less lugubrious aspect. It was one in which the hospital physicians met for conference in especial cases. André entered it, followed by the assistant doctor and the latter's superior.

"Now, my dear sir, if you will be kind enough to state the object of your visit I will do what I can to serve you," said Dr. Valbrègue.

"This gentleman is acquainted with Number Nineteen?" volunteered the assistant hastily.

"Oh, this is a great piece of news, and a most welcome one. I am beginning to despair of effecting a cure, and yet I could not bear the thought of sending the poor fellow to a madhouse. Have you seen him?"

"No, sir, not yet : but a young lady who saw him yesterday recognized him and lost no time in informing me of the fact, so that I came at once."

"You were quite right. We will take you to him immediately. But who is he?"

"He is one of my old schoolfellows, and his name is Louis Marbeuf."

"What did he do before his accident?"

"He was a clerk in a mercantile house in the Rue de Sentier."

"And his employer made no attempt to discover what had become of him? That is very singular." Then, after reflecting, the doctor added :

"But, sir, you were present on the day before yesterday, when I was telling Monsieur Vernelle about this unfortunate young fellow. Why didn't you then mention that one of your friends had disappeared in a mysterious manner?"

André started. The conversation was beginning badly, for almost the very first question asked by Dr. Valbrègue indicated a slight suspicion. However, some reply was imperative, and André could find nothing better to say than : "I was greatly preoccupied that day. The real state of Monsieur Vernelle's business affairs had just been made known to me ; and, besides, I had no idea that the patient you spoke of was my friend."

"But you knew that your friend had disappeared?"

"Yes, sir, and I thought of visiting the hospital, but it was only on the day before yesterday that I saw you at Monsieur Vernelle's, and yesterday I had not a single moment to myself. I intended calling on Thursday next, but this morning the young lady referred to told me she had seen Marbeuf here, and so I came at once."

"Oh, I do not blame you for the oversight. But let us return to our subject. You know your friend's present condition, probably, and how he happened to be brought here. Will you kindly enlighten me as to the circumstances that attended his mysterious disappearance? When did you see him last?"

"A little more than a month ago. I had just arrived in Paris, and he insisted upon my staying with him."

"Then you were not acting as Monsieur Vernelle's secretary at that time?"

"No, sir. I brought M. Vernelle a letter of recommendation from my mother, but I did not enter his employ until the following day."

"That is to say, not until the day after your friend's disappearance?"

"Quite so. On the evening of his disappearance we dined together at a restaurant at the corner of the Faubourg Montmartre and the Rue Lafayette. Marbeuf waited for me at a café at the corner of the Rue Drouot until my interview with Monsieur Vernelle was over."

"And after dinner what happened?"

"After dinner, between eight and nine o'clock, he left me."

"Did he tell you where he was going?"

André had expected this question, and he dreaded it, for he felt that he would be obliged to answer it with a falsehood ; for, if he told the truth, he would have to acquaint M. Vernelle's physician with the story of the bank-notes. He lacked courage to do this, so, though it cost him a terrible effort to speak an untruth, he replied in the negative. "But knowing his habits, you may have been able to conjecture where he was going?" urged the doctor.

"I was not familiar with his habits, sir. We had not seen each other for several years, and I only reached his lodgings that morning. A neigh

bour, the young lady who recognised him yesterday, has since told me that he was in the habit of spending his evenings at a café and of not returning home until very late."

"At what café?"

"Probably at the café where he waited for me before dinner; but I don't know, for I inquired about him there, and the waiters said that they had seen nothing of him."

"But before leaving you, he must have given you some reason or excuse for a man must have some reason for thus deserting a friend he has not seen for a long time, especially when he has just dined with him."

"I asked him no questions, for I was in a hurry to return home. I had spent the previous night in the train and was very tired. In fact, it was he who refused to accompany him. He merely said to me that he would return home soon, and when midnight came, and he still failed to make his appearance, I began to feel anxious."

"You had not been asleep, then?"

"No, sir," replied André, who began to feel annoyed by this close examination. "I tried to sleep, but sleep wouldn't come. I was thinking about my prospects. My whole life seemed likely to change. M. Verne had just engaged me as his secretary; besides my friend's prolonged absence seemed unaccountable. Was it a presentiment? I don't know, but this much is certain—I passed a sleepless night."

"And afterwards?"

"I afterwards left the rooms which Marbeuf occupied in the Rue Lamartine."

"Without troubling yourself any further about him?"

"You are very much mistaken, sir. All the efforts that have been made to find him were made by me. His employers were informed of his strange disappearance, and so was the commissary of police. I also paid several visits to the Morgue."

"But you forgot to speak to Monsieur Vernelle about the affair."

"I did not think it necessary to say anything to him about it. He was not acquainted with Marbeuf, and his time was too much engrossed with business matters for me to trouble him about an affair that did not interest him in the least."

"But it must have interested you. To what cause did you attribute your friend's disappearance?"

"I feared he had been murdered."

"Have you any reason to suppose that he had a large sum of money on his person?"

"No, sir, but does it not occur to you that you are speaking very much as if you were a magistrate and I a suspected person? I trust that you don't suspect me of having attempted to kill my friend—I, who have come to identify and claim him."

"You are right," Dr. Valbrègue replied, smiling. "If you had felt any desire to get rid of him, you would not have come here to look for him, and I assure you that I am not actuated by the sentiments you impute to me. The questions I have put to you are purely scientific in their aim, as I will now explain to you. This is a very unusual case. In fact, it is the only case in the annals of medicine. The complete paralysis of the memory for thirty-five days after the accident, and while the general health of the patient remains unimpaired, is a fact that has never been noted before, at least, not to my knowledge. Consequently, it is a matter

of the utmost importance to us to ascertain the exact nature of the accident which produced it. I think it was a fall, but I am not sure; and it is to corroborate my theory that I have questioned you in regard to the circumstances of your friend's disappearance. You will permit me to refer to them again?"

"As often as you please, sir," replied André, calmed by this assurance.

"There are many different theories on this subject," continued Dr. Valbrègue. "Your friend may have been assaulted in the street—but robbery could not have been the motive of the crime, for his watch and several gold pieces were found in his pocket—or he may have been thrown from a window by some jealous husband or rival."

"All I can tell you, sir," replied André, "is that Marbeuf has always led a very quiet and moral life, and that during the short time I spent with him, he said nothing that would furnish the slightest foundation for this last theory."

"Then you know no more about what could have taken him to the Boulevard des Invalides than we do? It was there he was picked up, and that is a long way from the place where you left him."

"Yes, and I have not the slightest idea what could have taken him there; but it seems to me, sir, that the easiest way to solve the mystery would be to bring me face to face with him and allow me to question him myself. That was my chief object in coming."

"I thank you for reminding me of it. I ought to have thought of it at first," replied Dr. Valbrègue, without seeming in the least offended. Then turning to the assistant doctor, he said: "Bring Number Nineteen down to us, my dear Bosc."

"He isn't in the ward. He is walking in the garden."

"Very well, bring him in, then, but without taking him through the dissecting room. It isn't advisable to shock him by such a sight just as we are about to subject him to a decisive test." And again turning to André, Dr. Valbrègue added: "Step to the window, my dear sir. You see it looks out upon the garden, and before Bosc goes for your friend, tell me if you see him anywhere among the patients."

André understood the doctor's motive. The thoughtful practitioner wished to make sure that M. Vernelle's young secretary had not allowed himself to be deceived by a false report. There were several patients in the garden, and seen from a distance, in their long grey cloaks and caps, they all looked exactly alike. "I don't see him," murmured André.

At last, however, at the end of an almost deserted path, he espied Marbeuf, who was coming slowly towards the window, smoking a cigarette. "There he is!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, that is, indeed, our Number Nineteen," said the doctor, rubbing his hands. "Now we will see what we can gather from the interview."

"Go, my dear Bosc, but take care not to give him any hint of the truth. I place great dependence upon the effects of the first shock. Tell him some one wants to see him, but don't tell him who it is."

André was greatly agitated, but not merely by delight at again finding his old friend. The approach of the moment of recognition alarmed him. Marbeuf in all probability would not merely throw himself into his friend's arms. After his first transports of delight, an explanation would ensue, and if it did not come about naturally, Dr. Valbrègue would not fail to ask for it. What would Marbeuf say? Would he recall the whole story of

the bank-notes, and cast it, so to speak, in his friend's teeth, without paying any heed to the other persons present? There seemed to be good reason to apprehend this. A man who is suddenly aroused from a prolonged sleep is not likely to weigh his words very carefully, but to seize upon the first fact that presents itself to his mind; and if Marbeuf happened to recall the fact that the hundred thousand francs had been intrusted to him, André would at least be then and there convicted of falsehood. The doctor was not a magistrate; he was not endeavouring to discover the culprit in this affair, but he would certainly investigate it carefully in the interests of science. It was too late to shrink from the meeting now, for the assistant doctor had spoken to Marbeuf, and the two were ascending a short flight of steps that led to the room in which Dr. Valbrègue was awaiting them. Moreover, André could not have abandoned his unfortunate friend upon any consideration, so nerving himself for the worst, he went straight toward him, with both hands outstretched, exclaiming in a voice broken with emotion: "I find you at last, my dear Marbeuf, and in such a place! But I have come to take you away."

Dr. Valbrègue and the assistant doctor had kept a little in the background in order not to interfere with the mental phenomena they were so anxious to watch. They were all eyes and ears, and were not kept waiting long. Instead of taking the hands that Subligny extended to him, the patient recoiled, changed countenance, and murmured as he passed his hand over his forehead: "Marbeuf! Did you say Marbeuf?"

"I ought to have said, 'My dear Louis,' for we have known each other from our childhood."

"Yes; I recollect. Louis Marbeuf. That is my name, but I don't know you at all."

"I am André Subligny."

"André Subligny. Wait a moment. Were you not at Charlemagne College with me?"

"Yes, and in the same class."

"And you afterwards returned to your native town?"

"To Havre, yes. But we have met since then."

"I don't recollect it."

"What, have you forgotten that you insisted upon my accepting your hospitality when I came to Paris, only last month, and that I stayed with you at your rooms in the Rue Lamartine?"

"True. I did live in the Rue Lamartine. I remember now."

"Do you remember, too, the day we dined together at the restaurant?"

"No. I don't recollect that."

André experienced a feeling of profound relief. If Marbeuf did not recollect the dinner, he might not remember about the one hundred thousand francs taken from M. Vernelle's office. Subligny's delight was not in the least selfish, however, for it was not due to any desire that his friend's fortunate condition should be prolonged. On the contrary, he earnestly hoped that his complete recovery would speedily ensue, though not until he could have a private interview with Marbeuf. "I hear you have lost your memory entirely in consequence of an accident, my dear fellow," continued André—"a fall, probably."

"These gentlemen think so," replied Marbeuf, "but I haven't the slightest idea as to what happened to me."

"But you hold the clue, now that you can recall your name. All the past will come to you. You certainly know me now, do you not?"

"Yes, I know you, though you have greatly changed since you left college."

"But not since I stayed with you."

"Did you stay with me? Of course I believe it if you say so, but how do my rooms look? I don't remember them at all, or the house either."

"Your rooms are on the fourth floor, and overlook the street. The staircase is narrow, and you have, as a neighbour, a young and very pretty milliner. It was she who recognised you yesterday in the ward."

"Oh, I remember her. She came to see her uncle who occupies the bed opposite mine. It seemed to me then that her face was familiar to me. I said so at the time to this gentleman."

"That is a fact," remarked the assistant.

"But I must have had some employment," said Marbeuf. "What was it?"

"You were employed by Messrs. Pivot and Garnier, in the Rue du Sentier."

"Yes, yes. A vague recollection of the office has haunted me in my lucid moments; and now I can distinctly recall the faces of my employers. Pivot is stout and red-faced; Garnier is as wrinkled as a piece of parchment, and as yellow as a lemon. What did they say when I disappeared? I hope they did not accuse me of making off with any of their money?"

"No, but they have filled your place."

"That doesn't surprise me. A man who leaves his place, loses it."

"You will find another, for you are free now. Dr. Valbrègue will not detain you here any longer."

"Certainly not," said the doctor. "I will sign your discharge, and then this gentleman and myself will take you home."

Marbeuf's face, instead of brightening, suddenly clouded. "What will become of me there?" he muttered. "I shall die of starvation."

"Never, while I live!" exclaimed Subigny. "We are henceforth brothers, my dear Louis. Make an effort, and I am sure that you will remember me perfectly."

"Yes, I remember you now, but what are you doing in Paris?"

This question embarrassed André considerably, although he might have foreseen it. "I am a clerk like yourself," he replied evasively.

"In a mercantile house?"

"At a bank," said André, to avoid uttering a name which might too abruptly remind his friend of his adventure.

"At Monsieur Vernelle's bank, in the Rue Bergère," added the doctor, who had not the same reasons for avoiding names. "Monsieur Subigny is Monsieur Vernelle's private secretary."

"Vernelle!" repeated Marbeuf, closing his eyes, like a man who is trying to recall something. "Wait, oh yes, I know him. I have often had business with his cashier."

André was upon thorns, but he said nothing, for fear of arousing the still dormant memory of Marbeuf, who resumed: "Hadh't you a letter of introduction to deliver to him when you arrived in Paris?"

"I did deliver it to him. He received me very graciously, proposed that I should act as his secretary, and I entered upon my duties the following day."

"You saw him for the first time the day I disappeared? Didn't he give you some commission for me?" inquired Marbeuf, eagerly.

"No, he is not acquainted with you," stammered Subligny, becoming more and more uneasy.

"It is very strange," murmured Marbeuf: "I thought I had the clue for an instant; but suddenly, everything again became a blank." On hearing this, André breathed freely once more.

"My friend," said the doctor, "you will not regain your memory here. While you are in the hospital, little or no light will enter your brain. You must have a change of scene. Some sudden shock would probably do even better. That will come. In the meantime, Monsieur Bosc will prepare your discharge and take you to the dressing-room where you can exchange your hospital garb for the clothes you wore when you were brought here. Pass out through the garden. I must see the director a moment, and I will then join you in the court-yard."

Marbeuf thereupon followed Bosc from the room.

"Ah, well," said the doctor, as soon as he was left alone with André, "you have certainly effected a marvellous cure. It is not complete yet, but it soon will be, for a great progress has been made. My expectations were not fully realised, however. I thought the restoration of your friend's memory would be complete and instantaneous. It has been but partial. The case is all the more interesting on that account, however, and I intend to follow it up to the very end." This announcement was by no means pleasing to André, who dreaded the final awakening under Dr. Valbrègue's vigilant eye, but it did not become him to make any objections to the learned doctor's plans. "Besides, this poor fellow does not interest me solely as a patient," Valbrègue continued. "I am anxious about the condition to which his accident has reduced him. He has lost his situation and probably has not even money enough to supply his immediate wants. He will re-enter life as destitute as a shipwrecked sailor who has been dashed naked upon the shore. Who knows, indeed, but his former employers will regard him with suspicion on account of his accident? You are his friend, and you will not desert him I'm sure, but I also wish to help him in procuring employment. What a pity that excellent Monsieur Vernelle is reduced to bankruptcy! I am sure that he would have taken the poor fellow into his employ. But unfortunately, that is not to be thought of now."

"Alas, no. In less than a month the house won't be any longer in existence."

"But now I think of it, you, my dear sir, are likely to find yourself in a similar situation, and yet, you seem to think only of your friend. It is very generous of you, and if I can be of service to you, in any way—"

"I am infinitely obliged, to you, sir, for your kind words, but I shall follow Monsieur Vernelle's fortunes. He has been kind enough to promise me his daughter's hand in marriage, and in a few days I shall be his son-in-law."

"Indeed! Ah, well, I congratulate you with all my heart. You must assist Mademoiselle Vernelle in watching over her father's health," added the doctor. "He has just had a narrow escape, and if those dastardly attempts should be repeated, he could not resist them long."

"I should be greatly obliged if you would say nothing to him about my friend Marbeuf's adventure," remarked Subligny. "It would affect him deeply because it concerns me, and it is of the utmost importance that his mind should not be distracted just at the present time."

"That is true. I won't say a word to him upon the subject. But

Number Nineteen must be ready by this time. Come, sir, we will pass out through the surgical ward. You will doubtless prefer that to the dead-room.

André bowed, and followed Dr. Vallrègue. They passed through a long ward like the one Subligny had already visited, with this difference only: nearly all the beds were occupied, although the weather was superb, for the wounded and crippled feel little inclination to hobble about. Marbeuf and the assistant doctor were already waiting in the court-yard—Marbeuf dressed exactly as he had been on leaving the restaurant in the Rue Lafayette, and rejuvenated, transformed, as it were, by his change of apparel. Dr. Vallrègue excused himself for a moment in order to go and inform the director of the departure of the interesting patient; but he soon returned and said: "My carriage is waiting, and I will drive these gentlemen to the Rue Lamartine. I shall not be back to-day, my dear Bosc. I will postpone the autopsy until after my round to-morrow morning."

André would gladly have dispensed with the doctor's company, but it was impossible to offer an objection to the arrangement, so he entered the carriage after giving Marbeuf's address to the doctor, who transmitted it, in turn, to his coachman. Number Nineteen was delighted to breathe the open air of the streets once more. He gazed with apparent interest at the passers-by, but evinced little inclination to talk, either because his sojourn in the hospital had rendered him taciturn, or because he was endeavouring to recall memories buried in profound oblivion. His silence was a great relief to André, who still dreaded any inopportune return of his friend's memory; and the doctor on his side felt no desire to trouble his patient uselessly. He was waiting for a favourable opportunity to question him.

The coachman had chosen the longest but most practicable route, and the horses were soon trotting briskly along the Boulevard Montparnasse. Just as they were passing the corner of the Rue de Babylone and the Boulevard des Invalides, Dr. Vallrègue remarked to Marbeuf: "You see that high wall over there? It was at the foot of it that you were picked up."

"So I have been told," replied Marbeuf, "but I can't imagine how I happened to be in this neighbourhood. I am acquainted with nobody about here. The neighbourhood isn't at all familiar to me."

"You may have been brought here in a cab."

"Very possibly. It seems to me that I have an indistinct recollection of having been driven about the streets for a long time."

"Why did you never mention this fact to me before? The prefect of police might have discovered the driver who brought you here, for you could not have alighted from his vehicle without his knowledge."

"I did not mention the fact, or rather the impression, before, because it has only just occurred to me."

"And now it is too late. One can't expect a driver to recollect a trip he made more than a month ago. Besides, it is useless to try to interest the police in the matter. Your case is only interesting to the physician. You are my exclusive property, my dear patient; and I trust we shall not lose sight of each other. I shall call on you often, and I hope you will come to my consulting-room at least twice a week. I will let you know the hours at which I receive patients."

"Nothing could afford me greater pleasure, for you have been very kind to me; but I must try to find some way of earning my living."

"Of course, and you can rely upon my assistance. Your friend and myself will obtain you some situation that will suit you, never fear. It

gives me great pleasure to see you show this solicitude in regard to your future. It is a good sign. You are beginning to get your ideas together. You will soon be yourself again. But why don't you try to re-enter the mercantile house in which you were employed prior to your accident?"

"That would be useless. My former employers would not take me back. A merchant always distrusts an employé who may absent himself at any time; and as proof that these gentlemen do not think much of me, they didn't trouble themselves to find out what had become of me."

"Better and better. You reason as if you had never had your skull damaged. Your improvement is rapid; and in a very short time you will again be in full possession of all your faculties, including that of memory. Now, these are my orders for the present; moderate and wholesome nourishment, absolute repose of mind, and plenty of exercise. Walk about the streets, and especially frequent the neighbourhood of the Faubourg Montmartre. It was there that you left your friend, and it was there that your nocturnal adventure must have begun. Who knows but the sight of some insignificant object like a house, a shop, or a street corner, even, may put you on the track."

"It is easy to lounge about when one has nothing to do," muttered Marbeuf; "but eating is quite a different matter."

"I understand that, my dear patient. One cannot live upon air, so I beg that you will allow me to provide for your immediate wants," said Dr. Valbrègue, drawing a five-hundred-franc note from his pocket-book. Then seeing that Marbeuf seemed disposed to decline taking it, the worthy doctor added, quickly; "It is only a loan. You can repay it as soon as you obtain a situation—repay it in instalments, so you need not inconvenience yourself in the least. Accept this slight service, I beg of you. You will wound me very much if you refuse."

Encouraged by a few words from André, Marbeuf yielded, thanking the doctor warmly, and in well-chosen terms. While this conversation was going on, the carriage had nearly reached its destination. After passing the bridge and the Place de la Concorde, and traversing the Rue Royale, the Rue Tronchet and the Rue du Havre, it was now rolling rapidly along the Rue Saint Lazare, which leads to the Rue Lamartine. "Heaven grant that I may find my furniture safe!" sighed Marbeuf.

"Have no fears. It has not been disturbed," said André. "The commissary of police, who was informed of your absence, sealed your door up."

"It must have been generally supposed that I was dead, then?"

"What else could we think? You had gone away without taking any luggage with you, and without informing the doorkeeper that you would be absent for a month and more. She will take you for a ghost."

As André spoke, the carriage drew up in front of the house.

"Well, my friend, do you recognise your residence?" inquired the doctor.

"Perfectly. It seems to me that I left it only yesterday, though I am very glad to get back to it again. Excuse me if I go up first."

The doctor followed his patient closely, however, and André brought up the rear. In another instant, loud exclamations of astonishment resounded through the hall, as the doorkeeper recognised Marbeuf, and gave vent to her surprise and delight. Marbeuf scarcely noticed her, but hastened upstairs in order to avoid any explanation, to the great astonishment of his mother Hippolyte, who had several things to say to him, and many more to ask him. In fact, she was so amazed that she allowed Dr. Valbrègue

to pass on unchallenged, but when Subligny appeared, she exclaimed : "So you have found him at last ? Where has he come from ?"

"He has been on a journey."

"A strange kind of journey ! He left without any trunk, and in the same clothes he now has on his back, and he took no more notice of me just now than if he had returned from drinking a glass. And I went and reported his disappearance to the commissary of police ! I shall now have to go and tell him that the bird has returned to his cage."

"That isn't necessary. Marbeuf will go himself, and he will tell you about his trip some other time. But tell me, is Mademoiselle Babois at home ?"

"No, she went out some time ago, and hasn't yet returned. That reminds me—she left a message for you."

"What was it ?" inquired Subligny, eagerly.

"She told me to ask you to wait for her, if you came back before she did, and said she would not be gone long. But, my goodness ! she left the house about half an hour after you did, and I have not seen her since. She went out with the stout woman you met on the staircase, her employer, I think. At least, Mademoiselle Babois had a handbox in her hand. When she comes in, shall I tell her you are upstairs ?"

"Certainly, and you might add that I am very anxious to see her, and that I should be greatly obliged to her if she would knock at Marbeuf's door."

André had, in fact, met a woman on the staircase, but being in great haste, he had scarcely glanced at her ; besides, he had not seen Madame Divet often enough to recognise her readily. However, the doorkeeper's announcement now surprised and alarmed him. "What !" he muttered, as he flew upstairs three steps at a time, to overtake his friend, "can this unfortunate child have really gone out with the woman against whom I had just warned her ? I know she intended to go to the shop, but why did her employer come for her ? Can it have been to draw her into some trap, and then deliver her up to the Russian prince ? It must be now at least four hours since she left the house. What has become of her ? I must find out, with the least possible delay. I will start for the Boulevard Magenta as soon as the doctor leaves ; but no, I must first question Marbeuf, and I cannot do that in Dr. Valbrègue's presence."

On reaching the fourth floor André found the door open, for Marbeuf, encouraged by Dr. Valbrègue, had broken the seals, and was now making the tour of his apartments. He had the triumphant air of an exiled king who has at last returned to his capital, and seemed to feel an almost childish delight in taking an inventory of his treasures. "Here is my writing-table !" he exclaimed, "here is my armchair, and here is my bed ! I shall sleep better here than in Number Nineteen, though that was not an uncomfortable couch, by any means. Here are my engravings, my photographs, and my cuckoo-clock ! Nothing has been disturbed."

"I was the only person who entered the room after your departure," remarked André.

"But look ! my revolver is no longer hanging on the wall !" cried Marbeuf. "Was it you who took it ?"

André blushed. He had entirely forgotten the revolver which Babiole had prevented him from using ; but he now remembered that Chantepie had neglected to return it to him. "Yes," replied Subligny, "I was examining it the evening you left, and forget where I put it, but I will find it again."

The doctor listened, smiling, rejoiced to see his interesting patient regain his mental powers so rapidly. "You are safe now, my friend," he said to him. "Your memory is returning at a gallop, and will soon be entirely restored. It is only a question of a few days, or even hours, now. But I haven't time to await your complete recovery here. Follow my directions implicitly, and call to see me every Wednesday and Saturday, from two to four, at No. 15 Rue Halévy. I leave you in Monsieur Subligny's charge, and to prevent any one from disturbing the quiet of which you stand in much in need, I will notify the commissary of police of your return as you pass his office, and request him not to trouble you. I will tell him your story, and he will understand that he need give himself no further anxiety about you. As for you, monsieur," continued Valbrègue, turning to André, "I need not commend your friend to your care, for I know your devotion to him; but you will kindly remember me to Monsieur Vernelle and his charming daughter? It will afford me very great pleasure to be present at your wedding when it takes place." The physician accompanied these remarks with two hearty handshakes, and the one he gave Marbeuf was none the less cordial from the fact that he felt his patient's pulse as he did so, purely from force of habit. "You have a little fever," he remarked. "It will subside, but remember, there must be no excitement."

With this last bit of advice the physician went off, André accompanying him as far as the landing. On his return, Marbeuf threw himself into his arms. "You have saved my life!" he exclaimed. "I should have died there in the hospital, or rather I should have gone mad."

"It was not I who saved you, but your pretty neighbour. If she had not recognised you yesterday, the idea of going to the hospital to look for you would never have occurred to me. But tell me about yourself. Is it really true that you have forgotten everything?"

"It is true. Can you suppose that I was playing such a trick for the sake of remaining in a place where I had no more freedom than in a prison?"

"No, certainly not. But I thought your memory had perhaps returned since you had seen me; and I felt very grateful to you for saying nothing before Dr. Valbrègue, for he is Monsieur Vernelle's physician."

"I don't understand your meaning very clearly. Can you have anything to conceal from your employer? By the way, you are going to marry his daughter, it seems. That is a piece of good news, surely. You will become his partner one of these days, and then you can give me a place in the house of Subligny & Co."

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure, my friend; but the house is no longer in existence. I shall be married in about a week, but Monsieur Vernelle will be obliged to retire at the end of the month. He has met with tremendous losses lately."

"I am sorry to hear it, for he is a very worthy man."

"And a strictly honest man, I assure you. But is it possible that you have forgotten what I did? I was the chief cause of your misfortune, my poor Louis."

"Nonsense!"

"Listen to me, and I will briefly review the incidents of the last day we spent together. It will be the best way to refresh your memory. Perhaps, though, I had better proceed by questions. Do you recollect my arriving here at five o'clock in the morning?"

"Perfectly. I had prepared a bed for you, you laid down and went to sleep, while I went to the office."

"And you returned in the afternoon to go with me to Monsieur Vernelle's. I had a letter of introduction to deliver to him."

"Yes, I recollect now."

"You accompanied me to his door, and then left me, telling me you would wait for me in a café at the corner of the Rue Drouot."

"Yes, and an hour afterwards, you returned to report that Vernelle had received you very cordially."

"I told you something more: that in a moment of mental aberration, I had put a package of bank-notes in my pocket."

"A package containing one hundred thousand francs!" exclaimed Marbeuf, as if a light had suddenly broke upon his mind.

"Yes, one hundred thousand francs. I desired to make restitution at any cost, but did not know how to do it when you offered to extricate me from my embarrassing position."

"And I took you to a restaurant to dine."

"Where I intrusted the money to you. You were to restore it to Monsieur Vernelle that same evening, and tell him that you had picked it up in the courtyard."

"That is true, I recollect now. And afterwards—"

"Afterwards we left the restaurant and separated. I was to go to your rooms and wait for you. You started off in the direction of the Rue Bergère, and I saw nothing more of you."

"Then you must have suspected me of making off with the money?"

"No, I feared you had been killed and robbed, and I wasn't far from right. Some one did certainly attack you and take the bank-notes from you, as they were not found upon your person when you arrived at the hospital. Try to remember what happened to you, and tell me. Did you go to Monsieur Vernelle's house?"

"It seems to me that I did."

"It is more than probable that you did, for it is not at all likely that you were molested on your way from the Rue Lafayette to the Rue Bergère. It wasn't nine o'clock, and the Faubourg Montmartre was full of people. Still, you did not see Monsieur Vernelle, for I have since learned that he went to the theatre that evening with his daughter."

"I have an indistinct recollection that the doorkeeper told me so."

"Did you start off in search of Monsieur Vernelle?"

"I think not."

"But you were picked up on the Boulevard des Invalides the next morning."

"I cannot imagine how I got there, unless I was taken there in a cab. That is the doctor's idea."

"Did you go into any café or wineshop where you could have been drugged?"

"I am sure I didn't. You had trusted me with one hundred thousand francs, and I was deeply impressed with a sense of my responsibility. I should not have accepted the invitation of any chance acquaintance, or even that of a friend, or have allowed a stranger to engage me in conversation in the street. Some one must have sprung upon me from behind, and dealt me a blow that reduced me to insensibility. But you, my dear André, what were you doing while the money you had confided to me was being stolen? And how did you get out of the scrape in which you must have found yourself? for you must have got safely out of it in some way, as you are about to marry Mademoiselle Vernelle."

"I waited all night for you in vain. At last, despair seized hold of me, and taking down the revolver for which you were inquiring just now, was about to blow my brains out when your neighbour rapped at the door. She saved my life."

"Good! But what did your employer say the next day, when he discovered that the money was missing?"

"There was no money missing. The cashier had seen me take the bank-notes, and he refunded the amount out of his own pocket."

"The cashier? He must be very rich and very generous, for he was an entire stranger to you."

"It seems that he knew my father. Besides, he made me sign a receipt for the amount. This receipt places me entirely at his mercy, and I now deeply regret having given it to him, for I have no confidence in him. Don't you recollect his dining in the same restaurant, at the table opposite ours?"

"No; but I shall perhaps recall the circumstance later on."

"I shall have only too much occasion to speak of him, I fear; but must leave you now, my dear Louis."

"Already?"

"Oh, not for any length of time. We will breakfast together to-morrow morning; but to-day my time isn't my own. I have some business that must be attended to immediately, and I am to dine with M. Vernelle this evening."

"Never mind, then. I have plenty to occupy me here and elsewhere. But where are you living now?"

"At No 25, Rue Rougemont; but it is useless for you to trouble about calling for me. I am never there. I will call for you a little before twelve to-morrow. By that time, I hope that your memory will be completely restored. Don't forget the doctor's instructions; and if you see your pretty neighbour before I do, thank her; however, don't say anything to her about the bank-notes."

"You need have no fears of that. I have never been a gossip, and since my adventure I am less than ever inclined to be garrulous."

André shook hands with his friend, and hurried off. He was worried about Babiole, and he had only curtailed the interview because he was anxious to go to the poor girl's help. He had a presentiment that she was in danger, and remembered that he had sworn to save her. In fact, just then, he could think only of her. Mademoiselle Vernelle had been relegated to a secondary place in his thoughts, though he was not in the least conscious of the fact. He rushed downstairs without paying any attention to the questions of the doorkeeper, and jumped into a passing cab in order to reach the Boulevard Magenta more quickly. He little suspected that Babiole was no longer at the house of her unscrupulous employer.

X.

THE opiate administered by Madame Divet must have been very powerful for Babiole did not wake until noon on the following day. Perhaps, the milliner had not calculated the dose properly; what would merely send a robust man to sleep for a few hours, might kill a delicate girl of sixteen. Still, she had not the slightest desire to really injure Babiole. On the contrary, she was, in her way, really fond of her, and, moreover, she hoped

that she herself would profit considerably by the young girl's grace and beauty. She had thus introduced her to Bertaud, but the latter, although very rich, was both miserly and ugly; Babiole had from the very first refused to have anything to do with him, and Madame Divet realised that it would be a difficult matter to overcome the girl's prejudices. It thus happened that she had now ventured upon measures that might involve her in trouble with the authorities. Still she had taken her precautions; having exacted from the prince a promise that Babiole should not be detained against her will. In fact, Madame Divet feared the intervention of the authorities, and did not at all care for the pleasure of sitting in the dock even by the side of a prince of All the Russias.

When Babiole woke up after four-and-twenty hours of her life had thus been stolen from her, she thought she must surely be dreaming. She was lying, completely dressed, upon a large sofa, with her head resting upon a soft cushion. A large fur cloak had been thrown over her, to protect her from the cold—an unnecessary precaution, for a bright fire was blazing on the hearth, and the furnaces that heated the entire house maintained a temperature of seventy degrees, the prescribed temperature in the homes of wealthy Muscovites. Upon a low table that stood within her reach there burned a lamp, the soft light of which was still further subdued by a globe of ground glass. The daylight, which now stole in through the high, stained-glass windows, disclosed to view a richly decorated ceiling, and walls hung with old tapestry. Luxurious chairs of every conceivable shape were scattered about, and there were four low Turkish sofas. In one corner of the room she saw a superb toilet-table, of richly carved rosewood and onyx, while upon another small table there stood a tea-set of Japanese porcelain, and a Russian samovar of burnished copper.

"Where am I?" murmured Babiole, gazing around her. Raising herself on one elbow, she passed her hand across her forehead as if to dispel the clouds that still obscured her thoughts. But she found this a difficult task. Her head was heavy; the blood rushed to her temples, and her eyes would close, in spite of all her efforts to keep them open. Suddenly, however, her memory returned to her. "Yes," she gasped, "I remember now; Madame Divet came for me. She insisted upon taking me home with her, and after we got there I was suddenly taken ill, and afterwards—I don't know—I probably fell asleep, and was brought here. What house is this? I never saw anything so beautiful. It is like a palace."

She threw back the fur cloak that covered her, and set her little feet upon a carpet as soft and thick as woodland moss. Then only did she understand the truth. "The prince!" she exclaimed. "I am his prisoner. That vile woman has delivered me into his hands—but I will die rather than yield to him! I will leave the house this instant."

She rose up and tried to take a few steps, but her limbs tottered under her, and she was obliged to lean against the wall for support. She looked around her for a door, but saw none. The tapestry probably concealed one from sight; however, perceiving a bell-rope near her, she pulled it violently. Almost at the same instant a woman appeared, and asked obsequiously: "Did Mademoiselle ring?"

She spoke as quietly as if she had been in Babiole's service for years, and had only been awaiting this signal to enter her mistress's presence. She was a middle-aged woman, and she had a prepossessing face. Babiole attempted to advance towards her, and, as she did so, she sternly asked: "Who are you?"

"I am at mademoiselle's orders," replied this strange maid, in the most respectful tone possible.

"Very well, then, open every door for me. I will not remain here a moment longer."

"Mademoiselle is in no condition to leave the house. Mademoiselle is too ill. Mademoiselle had better allow me to put her in bed."

"Open the doors, as I bid you." As Babiole spoke she took a few steps forward, and extended her hand to push the woman aside; but she had over-estimated her strength, for she staggered, and fell fainting into the arms of the maid.

When she again opened her eyes, she found herself upon a large, canopied bed, in another apartment. The maid had evidently carried her there and undressed her; she was now holding a bottle of smelling salts to her nostrils. Babiole repulsed her with a gesture of loathing; but the rebut was received with exemplary humility. The attendant was evidently accustomed to servitude. "Mademoiselle is in great need of rest," she said in a gentle voice; "that is why I took the liberty of putting mademoiselle to bed; and, as my presence seems to annoy mademoiselle, I will retire. Mademoiselle will find everything she needs on this little table by the bed, and if she wishes me to return, she has only to ring."

Then she tiptoed cautiously out of the room, leaving Babiole to her reflections. The poor child's brain was on fire, and her imagination, instead of becoming calmer, grew more and more excited. She was a prisoner—there was no longer any possible doubt of that—and closely guarded. The slave was not far off, and the master was probably at hand. Babiole even felt surprised that he had not shown himself before now; and she wondered with a shudder, what was likely to be her fate.

She would gladly have given her life to escape from this house; but how could she hope to do so? It was not likely that the Russian prince's servants would allow her to leave; but even if they made no attempt to stop her, she would not have strength to reach the street. "If I could only find some means of killing myself!" she murmured, as she endeavoured to raise herself to a sitting posture.

She finally succeeded in doing so, and at the same moment her eyes fell upon a small vial filled with a dark liquid which, upon examination, proved to be laudanum. This poison might serve as a last resource, she thought, so she hastily concealed the bottle under her pillow. Then a trifle reassured, she endeavoured to recollect what had occurred at Madame Divet's. More fortunate than Marbeuf, she finally succeeded in recalling the event which had led to her present perilous position. She recollected that her employer had given her something to drink which she had poured out in an adjoining room, and she could not doubt but what the beverage had been drugged. Babiole had not forgotten her intention of calling upon her employer and resigning her situation, but such a visit would probably have been a short one, and the highly-incensed lady would not have been likely to offer her guest any refreshments.

In fact, it took poor Babiole a long time to recollect the dodge by which her employer had managed to entice her to her house, and as the truth dawned upon her mind, she remembered André's situation and the letter concealed in her purse. She trembled, lest it might have been taken from her, and despite her weakness she dragged herself out of bed to a chair, on which her dress was lying. The purse was in her pocket and the letter safe inside. Thus reassured, she slipped her purse under her pillow, as she had

done with the vial of laudanum, and went to bed again. Ah ! if she could only escape she would still be able to save André. But his wedding would take place in a week or so, and who knew how long her detention would last. Besides, her fever was increasing, and her effort to rise had exhausted her completely. She trembled like a leaf shaken by the wind ; her temples throbbed, and her thoughts were becoming confused. " If delirium should seize me I am lost ! " she thought.

At the same time, she said to herself that the Russian prince certainly would not be so inhuman as to allow her to die without medical attendance ; that he would not refuse her permission to summon a physician, and that this physician—no matter how unfeeling he might be—would surely take her under his protection. She was about to ring for her attendant, and request her to send for a doctor, when the prince entered the room. Babiole recognized him instantly, though he now wore a rather odd costume. He was dressed à la Tartare, in a silk shirt, an embroidered caftan, flowing cassock, trousers, and tipilted Turkish slippers. " Ah, well, my pretty one," he began, stroking his grey moustache, " you are really ill, I hear. You look none the less charming, however. Still, I mean to punish that old hussy as she deserves, for making you swallow that drug to send you to sleep. Had she possessed a particle of tact, she wouldn't have been obliged to resort to such means, I am sure."

Babiole was magnificent to behold. Her eyes flashed fire, and the anger that transfigured her face restored both her courage and presence of mind. " I forbid you to address another word to me ! " she cried, imperiously.

" Nonsense ! "

" Do you suppose that I will consent to remain here a moment longer ? "

" I certainly hope so. This house is yours for a year ; and at the end of that time we will see. Perhaps I will then make you a present of it. You shall have the furniture, in any case. You will also receive three hundred louis per month ; and here is the first instalment," added the Russian, placing six one-thousand-franc notes on the table. Babiole snatched them up, and sent them flying across the room. " So your resistance is serious ! " exclaimed the prince. " Ah, well ! I like you all the better for it. I adore girls of spirit."

" You are an infamous scoundrel ! I am a child of the people, and yet I have far more nobility of soul than you ; and I despise you, for you have behaved in a most cowardly manner. You set a trap for me ; I fell into it, and you think I am at your mercy. You are mistaken. Keep your go ! l for shameless creatures ! You can torture me, you can kill me if you like ! I will die defying you, and my death will be avenged ! You may be sure of that."

" Torture you—kill you ! I should certainly be very sorry to do anything of the kind. Do you really take me for a barbarian ? I sha'n't compel you to accept a fortune, any more than I shall compel you to remain here."

" Do you mean to say that you won't oppose my leaving the house ? "

" Oh ! I have no desire to get myself into trouble with the authorities of your country. But if you do go, you will certainly regret it ; so I beg you will consider the matter well before you decide."

" My decision is already made. I shall leave the house, and at once."

" Come, calm yourself, let us have a little chat," said the prince, persuasively. " Remember that this is a question that affects your future. If I promised never to leave you, couldn't you be induced to listen to reason ? "

It is in your power to make yourself independent for life : and if you would like to travel, I will take you to Russia, and perhaps marry you, by-and-bye, who knows ? Besides, before you leave France, I will settle an income of twenty-five thousand francs upon you. It is agreed, is it not ? ”

As he spoke, the prince came a little nearer. However, Babiole hastily uncorked the vial of laudanum she held in her hand, raised it to her lips, and, casting a look of withering scorn and contempt upon the prince, firmly exclaimed : “ If you come one step nearer, I will kill myself ! ”

“ What have you there ? ” stammered the prince, in evident consternation.

“ It is poison ! ” Babiole answered, coldly. “ A few drops of it would only stupefy me, and place me again at your mercy ; but if you approach any nearer, I will drain the bottle to the dregs. There is enough, and more than enough, to kill me. ”

The prince drew back, and his tone instantly changed. He had noted the girl’s expression of indomitable resolution, and his passion did not blind him to the inevitable consequences of the suicide with which she threatened him. “ Calm yourself, mademoiselle, ” he said, soothingly. “ I assure you that I deeply regret what has passed, and that I have not the slightest intention of detaining you against your will. But you are not yet sufficiently recovered to leave the house ; so I will retire after giving orders to summon a physician. As soon as he assures you that you can safely leave you may do so. ”

Babiole intended to avail herself of this permission without delay ; so, as soon as the prince left the room, she attempted to rise, but her head fell back upon the pillow, and there it remained. The intense excitement prompted by her anger had given place to a nervous prostration that deprived her almost of the power to think, or move a finger. She was in the state of torpor which often precedes delirium, and while she was thus drifting towards a dangerous illness, the prince was holding a stormy interview in another room with Madame Divet. The latter, anxious as to the upshot of the disgraceful intrigue in which she had engaged, had called at a nice unfortunate moment, for the prince was furious, and very naturally felt a desire to vent his wrath upon his accomplice. “ So this is the way you serve me, you infamous hussy ! ” he exclaimed, savagely. “ A fine scrap you have got me into with a girl who hurls my money in my face, and threatens to poison herself. ”

“ I warned your excellency that she wasn’t easy to deal with, ” was the reply. “ Besides, I merely meddled with the matter to oblige your excellency—and the Baroness d’Orbec. ”

“ She may go to Hades ! ”

“ She leaves, this evening, for Monaco, which amounts to about the same thing, possibly. ”

“ Then you had better go with her ! I will never set eyes on her again while I live. As for this girl, you must get her out of the house as soon as you can ; I am not going to run any further risk for the sake of any French woman. If the baroness is really a married woman, as I heard last night at the club, I have plenty of trouble on my hands already ; for her husband may bring proceedings against me, and this she-tiger here is quite capable of denouncing me to the authorities. ”

“ These caprices cost one dear in Paris, prince. ”

“ That is very possible ; but if you don’t get me out of this scrape, swear that this affair shall cost you even dearer than it does me. ”

"But how can your excellency expect me to get you safely out of the scrape, when I don't even know what you have decided to do? I warn you, however, that if you attempt to detain this girl against her will, I shall wash my hands of the whole affair. The penalty for such an offence is several years' imprisonment, and I am not anxious for that, I assure you."

"In other words, you would denounce me. You are quite capable of it. If we were in Russia, I would have you flogged to death."

"But we are not in Russia, thank Heaven!"

"Hold your tongue, viper, and get this girl home. She has promised me that she will say nothing if I let her go; but I don't trust her."

"Nor do I; besides, she has an admirer who came to see me last night, and kicked up a terrible row about her strange disappearance," said Madame Divet, impelled by a desire to increase her companion's perturbation, and enhance the value of her services.

"Ah!" cried the prince. "Well, try and make the fellow hold his tongue, and you shall have all the money I promised you."

"Then shall I take the girl away at once?"

"You can't do that, I fancy. I fear she's ill, at least she looks like it."

"Will your excellency allow me to see her?" asked Madame Divet.

"You can do whatever you like, providing you never mention her name to me again."

"But if she grows worse, shall I send for a physician?"

"Of course. I wouldn't have her die here for the world!"

"Very well. I know a physician we can trust."

"Then send for him. If he asks any questions, tell him whatever you please, as long as you do not mention my name. I shall never set foot in this accursed house again. Olga, the chamber-maid, can remain here to wait on the girl. Make such arrangements as may seem best to you, and get her well as soon as possible. I took the house for a year; but as soon as the girl is out of it, it will afford me great pleasure to return the keys to the owner. In the meantime, I shall take up my quarters at the Continental Hotel. My majordomo will accompany me, so you will only have Olga to manage. She is devoted to me, and can be relied upon implicitly."

"Then all will go well, for your excellency can rely upon me with equal certainty."

"I rely upon never setting eyes on you again; I will make arrangements to hear from you every day; and as soon as I am satisfied that you have kept your engagement, my steward will give you the money I promised you. Remain here, and I will send Olga to you."

"This is what one gets for working for Cossacks!" muttered Madame Divet, as the prince disappeared. "Here is a man who was ready to set Paris on fire for Babiole's sake, but who slinks away like a whipped cur just because she puts on a few airs. He treats me nicely, after all I have done for him! Upon my word, I believe I would rather deal with that boor of a Bertaud. One doesn't run the risk of being dragged before the Assizes with him. I ought to have asked the Russian at least fifty thousand francs for getting him out of this scrape."

Madame Divet's soliloquy was interrupted by the entrance of the maid whom the prince had selected to wait upon Babiole. The two women looked at each other as augurs are said to have looked at one another when they met in the streets of ancient Rome. They measured each other at a glance, and they would have exchanged meaning smiles had they dared; but, determined not to be out-done in mutual respect, they began to dis-

cuss the matter gravely. "What do you think of the young lady's condition?" inquired Madame Divet. "The prince wishes her to be taken away; and if I could remove her at once—"

"That would be the best course," replied Olga. "I judged her character aright as soon as she awoke, but she is not able to sit up. Indeed, I fear that she is already very ill."

"The prince says I may see her, and send for a physician, if necessary."

"So he informed me, madame; and I will take you to her at once."

A moment later, these exemplary creatures entered the room where Babiole was lying, and found her in a truly alarming condition. The poor child had not moved since the prince's departure, and seemed to be utterly devoid of consciousness.

"Ah, well, little one, how do you feel?" inquired Madame Divet.

Babiole opened her eyes, recognised her employer, and shrinking from her with a gesture of loathing, murmured faintly: "Leave me! I hate you! Leave me, I say!"

"She is delirious," muttered Madame Divet.

"She used almost the same words to me," remarked Olga.

"André—the letter—I must see him!" continued Babiole.

"She is really ill. Her brain seems to be affected," said Madame Divet. "Her condition is even critical, I am afraid. My physician lives a long way off. Do you know of any in this neighbourhood?"

Olga answered affirmatively, and went off to summon him, leaving Madame Divet alone with the sick girl. Noticing that Babiole held something tightly clasped in her hands, she opened them, and found in one the vial of laudanum, and in the other the girl's purse. "I'll take the poison and put it in a safe place," she muttered. "It isn't right to leave such dangerous drugs within a young girl's reach. What would have become of us if she had taken it? But why does she keep such a tight hold on her purse? Can she be afraid it will be stolen from her? Oh, no, I remember it contains the letter to Madame Vernelle. Upon my word I shall let Babiole keep it." Thereupon she slipped the purse under the pillow on which the girl's head reclined, and murmured: "Heaven grant that she won't have an attack of brain-fever! That would interfere sadly with our plans."

Although Madame Divet had never studied medicine, her diagnosis of the case was only too correct. Babiole's malady was indeed one of those violent attacks of brain-fever which so often follow any intense strain upon the nerves, and which generally prove fatal. The patient struggles more or less successfully, according to his or her age and vigour of constitution, but the physician can do little or nothing.

The practitioner that Olga brought back with her proved to be a fashionable physician who resided in the vicinity of the Parc Monceau. Accustomed to the whims of the wealthy, he was discreet, as much from self-interest as from a sense of professional duty. He made no inquiries in regard to his new patient, or as to the circumstances which had made her an inmate of this luxurious mansion. Whatever responsibility there was in the matter fell upon the prince, in whose name he had been summoned. He attended the girl faithfully, however, not sparing his visits, though he had the good sense not to give her too much medicine. The first few days, and especially the first few nights, were terrible. The poor child was prey to the wildest delirium; and night after night it seemed as if she must succumb to the violence of the fever. Olga never left her; and in

order to carry out the prince's instructions, she had a bed brought into the sick room for her own use. As for Madame Divet, alarmed by the report of the doctor, who had declared at the outset that he could not vouch for Babiole's recovery, she left the house, but called every morning to make inquiries.

Olga met her at the door without inviting her in, and on the fourth day, in compliance with her master's orders, she requested her not to repeat her visits. Thereupon Madame Divet, crestfallen and anxious, returned home, where she remained awaiting the progress of events without being disturbed by any one; the prince had no desire to see her again; the baroness had left Paris, and André, engrossed, probably, by other matters, did not return to the establishment.

Babiole had relapsed into a state of complete insensibility. She no longer recognised any one, and when she woke from her stupor, it was only to ramble on in the most incoherent manner. She called for her mother; she talked about André; she anathematised Madame Divet; but all this incoherent talk had no apparent meaning, and the doctor, accustomed to delirium in all violent cases, attached no importance to the girl's words. Olga herself understood little or nothing of what she said, having no knowledge whatever of Babiole's past life. Matters went on in this way for one whole week; then a slight change for the better became apparent in the patient's condition. In this struggle between youth and disease, youth gradually gained the ascendancy. The paroxysms of fever occurred at longer intervals, and became less violent, and the mist that obscured the sick girl's intellect slowly faded away. An utter prostration followed this state of intense nervous excitement, and for several days Babiole was incapable of making the slightest movement; indeed, she scarcely had strength to think. However, the physician declared that all danger had passed, and that careful nursing and quiet alone were needed to insure complete recovery.

This second state lasted several days, Babiole all the while slowly regaining strength, though still unable to talk. She did not reject Olga's attentions. She accepted from her hand the various nourishing broths that the physician prescribed, but to the maid's almost affectionate questions, she only responded by signs. One would have supposed she desired time for reflection, before resuming the conversation interrupted by her sudden attack of illness. This, in fact, was not far from the truth. Babiole was endeavouring to recall all that had occurred. Her interview with the prince alone stood out clearly in her memory, and as she had not seen him since, she began to feel confident that he would keep his promise and allow her to leave the house. However, it was only after long efforts, that she recollected André's situation, and the terrible letter in her purse. She had found the latter, and now had but one idea, that of making her escape from the house. However, not being fully satisfied of her nurse's friendly intentions, she carefully refrained, not only from announcing her determination, but even from giving the slightest hint of it. She did thank Olga for her care, but without making any comment on the conduct of the prince, or saying a word about the past; and she did not ask a single question as to the nature of her illness, or the particulars of the crisis through which she had passed. She confined herself to expressing a desire to get up and walk about her room a little, as soon as the physician would permit it; and the desire met with no opposition. The doctor, when consulted by Olga, even declared that exercise would be very beneficial, if proper caution was observed. Babiole was first to walk about her room, then

about the house, and then in the garden, after which she might be allowed to drive out.

Olga made no objection, so, on the following day, Babiole carried out the doctor's instructions by taking several turns about her room. She had the satisfaction of finding that her limbs would sustain her, so the very next day she asked to be allowed to go out into the open air. Olga herself accompanied her into the garden connected with the house, lent her the support of her arm, during a short promenade up and down one of the walks, and finally seated her on a bench in the sun, promising to return for her in an hour's time.

The garden was small, and merely separated from the Parc Monceau by an iron gate, and, for the first time since her imprisonment, Babiole knew where she was, for she had neglected to question her attendant upon this point. This reserve had been intentional, Babiole wishing Olga to have no suspicions of her wish to go off; for even if Olga did not oppose the project, she would probably offer to accompany her, and such an arrangement would not have suited Babiole, who wished to see André before returning to her home in the Rue Lamartine. Everything seemed to indicate that Babiole had been left entirely alone with Olga, for on going down into the garden she had seen no other servant, nor any sign of life about the mansion. Rising up, she approached the gate, and was delighted to find that it opened from the inside, and that the key was in the lock. The opportunity was a tempting one. Why should she wait for another day? Unfortunately she was not dressed to go out. On rising, she had merely put on a long wrapper and a pair of Turkish slippers; and to protect herself effectually from the air, she had thrown round her a peculiar garment that could hardly fail to attract attention—a sort of Russian pelisse, taken by Olga from the prince's wardrobe—a long, fur-trimmed garment, with a hood and flowing sleeves. But what did that matter after all? To make her escape, she would gladly have traversed the streets of Paris in masquerade costume, so she might certainly make the venture in a cab in spite of her odd attire.

The question was, would she have strength to reach the nearest cab-stand. She finally resolved to make the attempt. It was early spring-time. The trees were already in bloom, but the air was keen, and at that season of the year, the Parc Monceau is well-nigh deserted early in the morning. Babiole crossed the park with no other incident than a meeting with several nurses, who laughed on seeing her pass with the hood of her cloak drawn down over her face, and dragging her slippers after her. The fresh air strengthened her, and hope sustained her. But would she see André in time? She did not know how many days had elapsed while she was hovering between life and death, nor had she any idea what day of the month it was; but she dared not question the policemen on duty in the park, for they were already gazing at her in astonishment, and, indeed, with an air that indicated strong doubts of her sanity.

At the corner of the Boulevard de Courcelles, however, she saw a newspaper stand, and the idea of purchasing a journal, and in that way discovering what she wished to know, occurred to her. The paper she bought bore the date of March 29th. She had been a prisoner exactly a fortnight, and André had told her that his marriage would take place before the expiration of the month. Babiole nearly swooned upon making this discovery. But this was no time for weakness. A moment's delay might cost André dear. Summoning all her strength, she succeeded in

keeping upon her feet, and an empty cab chancing to pass a moment afterwards, she beckoned to the driver, and entered the vehicle, after giving André's address. She alone could tell the agony she endured during the drive.

When the cab at last drew up in the Rue Rougemont, she was scarcely able to alight from it and to inquire for M. Subligny of the doorkeeper, who, after subjecting her to an insolent stare, replied : " You are unlucky, my girl. Monsieur Subligny wouldn't see you on a day like this, and you must have plenty of assurance to intrude upon him."

Under any other circumstances Babiole would not have allowed the doorkeeper to address her in this impertinent manner, but she was resolved to see André at any cost, so she said : " I am sure that Monsieur Subligny will see me if you will tell me how to find my way to his rooms."

" I tell you that you cannot see him," was the response. " You needn't take the trouble to go upstairs. It will do no good. You'll only have to come down again."

" Why, is he ill ? " inquired the girl, anxiously.

" Ill ? Well, that's a good joke ! This certainly would be a bad day for him to fall ill. He is as well and hearty as possible, very fortunately, for he is to be married this morning."

" This morning ! " repeated Babiole.

" The news seems to upset you rather, though I don't see why, for you certainly could not expect a handsome young man like him to remain single for ever." Then, seeing that Babiole had turned as pale as death, the doorkeeper continued : " You must be one of his old flames, as the news has such an effect upon you. So he has jilted you, eh ? "

" Married, he is married ! " Babiole answered, in consternation.

" No, not yet. He left the house only about twenty minutes ago in a carriage, and a fine carriage it was. They say his prospective father-in-law is a ruined man, but he does things handsomely for all that."

" Twenty minutes ago. Then there may still be time for me to see him. Where is he to be married ? "

" That is more than I am going to tell you. I see what you are after, my girl. You would like to make a scene with the lover who has jilted you. You need not expect any help from me, however, for the young man has always treated me very handsomely. Why, only just now, before he left, he gave me ten francs, and I am not going to let you give him any trouble."

" I assure you that I haven't the slightest intention of doing so—quite the contrary."

" Bah ! I know you. It is for his good, of course, that you are anxious to swoop down upon him in the middle of the ceremony. Go and tell that to the marines, my dear."

" I wish to save him," pleaded Babiole.

" Save him ! pooh ! Well, run after him, if you choose ; for even if you find out where he has gone, no great harm will be done, for you won't be admitted, dressed as you are. I wonder you are not ashamed to be seen gadding about Paris in such a garment as that." And re-entering his room, the fellow shut the door in Babiole's face.

The poor girl staggered, as she turned away, and it was with no little difficulty that she finally succeeded in regaining the street. Overwhelmed by this news and worn out with suffering, she scarcely had strength to walk, and yet her will sustained her.

She had not abandoned all hope of preventing the marriage, but the insolent doorkeeper had obstinately refused to give her any information in regard to it. Suddenly a happy thought occurred to her. M. Vernelle's house was at the corner of the next street. The servants there would not refuse to tell her what she wished to know. She beckoned the driver to follow her, and dragged herself along to the banker's door, heedless of the sneering smiles of the passers-by. At M. Vernelle's house she was met by a polite servant who recognized her from having seen her a fortnight before, and who probably recollected that his master had received her, for without displaying much astonishment at her strange costume, he informed her that M. Vernelle and his daughter had just left for the municipal offices in the Rue Drouot.

This news was encouraging. The marriage had not yet taken place. Throwing herself into the cab again, she implored the coachman to drive as fast as possible, strengthening this entreaty by the promise of a liberal gratuity; but she was at the mercy of a superannuated steed insensible to the stimulus of the whip. The Rue Drouot is certainly not far from the Rue Bergère, but the bridal party was at least twenty minutes in advance of her, and the ceremony does not last long. Still, it not unfrequently happens that the mayor keeps the party waiting.

Babiole longed for wings, but the horse crept along at the same snail's pace, and the nearer the poor girl approached the goal, the more she despaired of success. At last the vehicle drew up at a short distance from the municipal building, and Babiole alighted. Three handsome landaus, a little further on, were evidently waiting for the bridal party; consequently the ceremony could not be over.

Babiole hastened on, without even glancing at any one. Her strange costume attracted the attention of some policemen, but one is not obliged to be in full dress to gain admission into a mayor's office, so no one stopped her or inquired what she wanted. A gentleman who was just leaving the office of the justice of the peace, near the end of the hall, told her where the civil ceremony of marriage was celebrated, and she unhesitatingly climbed the staircase to the first floor. Guided by an inscription, she at last reached a large apartment crowded with people. She looked for the bridal couple she was in search of, but at first she only beheld strange faces. That day there were no fewer than three wedding parties awaiting the arrival of the mayor. At the further end of the apartment, was a platform surmounted by a bust of the Republic, but the mayor's chair was not yet occupied.

Babiole breathed again. There is still time. All she had to do now was to speak to André; but this was no easy matter, for she did not even see him. She thought he must be in a group that had gathered in front of the platform, but from the doorway she could not distinguish the faces of the party.

It would be necessary to step inside, but she dared not. However, by straining her eyes, she finally succeeded in recognising M. Vernelle, who was talking with two gentlemen she had never seen before—witnesses to his daughter's marriage, probably. They were standing; while Made-moiselle Vernelle was seated between two ladies—friends of the family, no doubt. A few intimate connections who had remained faithful to the banker in his adversity, alone were there. André, who had but few acquaintances in Paris, must be even more isolated. Babiole finally discovered him standing in the embrasure of a window, at some distance from

his betrothed, and accompanied by two gentlemen, one of whom was Louis Marbeuf.

The opportunity was a good one, and resolving to take advantage of it, she started towards André, keeping between the benches and the wall, but so great was her weakness, that she was obliged to pause more than once. She held the fatal letter in her hand, and meant to give it to Subigny without more ado, feeling that she herself would not have strength to speak. She was halfway across the room when suddenly a door, behind the platform, opened and a man entered carrying a copy of the Civil Code which he placed on the table in front of the mayor's arm-chair. The mayor himself was evidently about to arrive, for M. Vernelle approached his daughter who rose up and André joined them. Babiole had but a moment left to avert the calamity. Gathering up her strength she approached despairingly, but as she suddenly stumbled, her hood fell from her head disclosing her pallid face. Marbeuf recognised her, and divining some scandal, hurried to her side. "You unfortunate girl, what brings you here?" he asked.

"I must speak to Monsieur Subigny," gasped Babiole.

"No, no, you must go— There must be no scene here," said Marbeuf, who had greatly changed since the time when he was an inmate of the Necker Hospital.

"No, I will not go," said Babiole. "I have a letter to give your friend. Call him here— I won't speak to him, but merely hand him the note."

André had just caught sight of Babiole and had become very pale. He mistook her intentions, like Marbeuf had done, but he thought it best to intervene and have an explanation with her. So drawing near he hurriedly exclaimed, "I did not expect to see you here. What do you desire of me?"

Babiole handed him the letter, murmuring: "Read this, I beseech you— read it and afterwards—you will do as you please."

André, fairly stupefied, took the letter and exclaimed: "But this is my father's handwriting. What does it all mean?"

"Read, and forgive me," gasped Babiole tottering.

The scene was a strange one. M. Vernelle and his daughter witnessed it from a distance. Clémence, who had recognised Babiole, gave her father a questioning glance. Marbeuf was grinding his teeth, the other persons present looked bewildered, and André, who was perusing the letter, had become ghastly pale. Big tears coursed down his cheeks when he had finished reading. "Who gave you this letter?" he asked in a husky voice.

"A woman who holds all your father's correspondence with Madame Vernelle," replied Babiole without the least hesitation. "I couldn't bring it sooner. I was a prisoner, but I escaped and dragged myself here."

A buzz amid the throng announced the arrival of the mayor. "Come, you are wanted," exclaimed Marbeuf who failed to understand his friend's emotion.

André turned round in despair. The mayor, wearing his sash of office, stood on the platform. Clémence on her father's arm hesitated to advance. All eyes were fixed upon the bridegroom who behaved so strangely. He had fairly lost his head and no wonder. It was too late to enter into any explanation with Monsieur Vernelle. What should he do? He thought of rushing from the room, but Marbeuf pushed him towards the platform and as he stood in front of Clémence, the mayor began to read the clauses of the Code, respecting the duties of matrimony.

"How frightful!" gasped Babiole in consternation.

Marbeuf barred her way, believing that she had gone mad; and meanwhile, silence having been restored, the mayor raised his voice and asked "André Charles Subligny, do you consent to take Clémence Claire Vernel for your lawful wife?"

A loud "No!" was the response. It fell upon the room like a thunder-clap; and many of the people present imagined they had not heard aright. Others thought that the bridegroom, agitated by the solemnity of the ceremony, had answered the contrary of what he intended. But Clémence was not mistaken, and she fainted in her father's arms.

With the look of an executioner, who had just dealt the fatal blow with the axe, André strode away followed by Marbeuf, who was in dismay, and would willingly have wrung Babiole's neck. But she had gone. She had darted from the room amid the jeers of the by-standers, who considered her to be the sole cause of the scandal. A few ladies pitied her as a jilted girl is pitied. But no one imagined that by her courageous intervention she had averted a great moral, if not a legal crime. In the eyes of the law, Clémence was the banker's daughter; but Madame Vernelle had deceived her husband, and of all those present only Babiole and André knew the terrible truth.

Overcome by her heroic effort, Babiole had dragged herself to her chamber and she now drove to the Rue Lamartine, where fresh trials awaited her. The doorkeeper burst into loud exclamations on beholding her, and led her room for the express purpose of overwhelming her with questions and reproaches. Where had she come from, and what had she been doing during her fortnight's absence? this was a respectable house, and a girl who conducted herself in such a manner, must expect to be requested to move. Besides, Uncle Auguste had been there, and on hearing that his niece had been absent from her home so long, he had openly declared that he would have nothing more to do with her except to have her sent to some reformatory when she returned. She was a minor, and he was her guardian, so he had a perfect right to put a stop to such disgraceful freaks.

Babiole listened to this torrent of reproaches in silence, and without making any attempt to vindicate herself. She had made up her mind beforehand to bear the penalty of her devotion to André, so she went upstairs without replying. It was for André's sake that she had sacrificed herself—for his sake alone—for she had only consented to accompany Madame Divet home in the hope of securing a letter which would enable her to save him. It was no fault of hers that her infamous employer had betrayed her confidence, and delivered her over to a libertine, from whom she had only escaped by a miracle. Her honour was safe, it is true, but she had good reason to fear that her good name was irretrievably compromised while she had not even the consolation of being able to look upon André as a grateful friend. Perhaps he cursed her; at all events, he would never willingly set eyes on her again. There seemed to be nothing left for her but to die.

She locked herself in her rooms, fell sobbing upon a chair, and buried her tear-stained face in her hands.

So this was her reward for all her sufferings, and for the risk she had run in order to save the man she loved from eternal remorse. She did not regret what she had done—she only regretted that her illness had not proved fatal; and, in her secret heart, she hoped that a relapse would remove her from a world in which there no longer seemed to be any place for her.

She had been weeping a long while, when a violent pull of the bell made her start. Could it be André who had come to see her at such a time? She ran to the door and opened it. Marbeuf entered, his face flushed with anger. "Wretched girl! What have you done?" he exclaimed.

"Was it André who sent you here?" she inquired.

"I have not seen him since the catastrophe you brought down upon us. He fled like a madman, and I should not be surprised if he has gone to drown himself. Monsieur Vernelle is nearly frantic with grief, for his daughter is at the point of death. All this is your work."

"Question Monsieur Subligny. He will tell you why I acted as I did; and if he has any feeling he will take my defence."

"Defend yourself, and tell me what was in that letter you handed him?"

"Never!" cried Babiole. "It is his secret, I cannot reveal it to you."

"He has no secrets from me."

"Well, he will tell it you. Don't insist; but when you see your friend, you may assure him that he will never see me or hear of me again. Now, I need rest, and I must beg of you to leave me."

Marbeuf, somewhat disconcerted by this firm reply, sullenly complied with her request, and Babiole, after again slipping the bolt, murmured to herself: "André, I saved your life, and yet you are killing me. I shall die of grief, but I love you, I love you, and my last thought will be of you!"

XI.

ANDRÉ had cut the Gordian knot in the mayor's office for want of time to untie it; but it does not always suffice to amputate the limb of an injured man to save him. The poor fellow could not give any satisfactory explanation to Mademoiselle Vernelle and her father. The scandal had been a frightful one, and Clémence had not recovered from the shock, which had so nearly killed her upon the spot. Her father, who must be deeply incensed by André's conduct, would not lower himself to ask for explanations; but Madame Subligny, who had come from Havre expressly to attend her son's wedding, had not understood anything of the scene, and André could not reveal the truth to her. To whom could he apply for assistance in extricating himself from this intolerable position?

Babiole knew the truth, but she could do nothing. Vernelle would refuse to grant her an interview, for he must regard her with suspicion. Clémence had recognised her at the mayor's office, and no doubt believed that André was in love with her. Marbeuf might possibly consent to serve as an ambassador, and try to vindicate his friend; but Marbeuf would scarcely exercise any influence, for M. Vernelle, who was not acquainted with him personally, but was aware of his prolonged sojourn in the hospital, might consider him to be a sort of madman, upon whose words little or no reliance could be placed. After long reflection André finally thought of Dr. Valbrègue, who seemed to him to be the most suitable person to enlighten the father and daughter respecting all the facts of the case. A physician is a sort of father confessor; one can confide anything to him, and Dr. Valbrègue had seemed to take not only a friendly interest in his patient, the banker, but also in the young secretary who had assisted him so much in accomplishing the cure of his remarkable patient. Of late times Dr. Valbrègue had not lost sight of Marbeuf. He had insisted upon a continuance of his visits, and on each occasion he had subjected him to a fresh

examination, still hoping to discover the nature of the accident that had destroyed the memory of this remarkable patient. If the doctor failed to secure any definite information on this point, the report he counted upon making to the Academy of Medicine would necessarily remain incomplete.

Unfortunately, Marbeuf was, as regards memory, in the same mental condition as on the day of his departure from the hospital. He had regained complete possession of all his other faculties; he was looking for a situation and was as capable of filling the position of accountant as formerly, but he could recollect little, prior to the time of his admission into the hospital. He did, certainly, recollect rather more than he was willing to admit to the doctor. André had reminded him of the incidents that had preceded the accident, but Marbeuf was obliged to remain silent on this subject, under penalty of injuring his friend; besides, these facts threw no light upon what had afterwards happened to him. Still, Dr. Valbrègue did not despair. Sometimes he even thought strongly of adopting the plan suggested by his assistant: that of taking Marbeuf about the streets of Paris. But in order to make this experiment with any chance of success, he needed information which Marbeuf was unwilling to give, or in other words, some clue.

Two days after the scene in the mayor's office, Subligny finally decided, after a sleepless night, to apply to Dr. Valbrègue for advice and assistance. He determined to relate all the circumstances to him and solicit his aid; and to secure this it would be necessary to tell him everything without reserve. Intense as was his anxiety to finish with the matter, he realized that it was best not to see the doctor at the hospital, where he would find him surrounded by students; besides, Dr. Valbrègue, as soon as his morning round was ended, was obliged to hurry off to visit other patients. From two to four o'clock, however, he received people at home, and this was the best time of day that André could select for his interview.

This interview was the more urgent as on rising that morning, André had received a very curt note from M. Vernelle, in which the banker forbade his ever entering his presence again, and in which no allusion whatever was made to Clémence. Madame Subligny, without asking her son for an explanation of his conduct, had taken the first train for Havre. André was consequently at liberty to act according to his judgment, and he began by calling on Marbeuf, whom he found in a very savage mood. He calmed him a little by telling him that Babirole had nothing to reproach herself with; and he expressed great astonishment on learning that she had again left the Rue Lamartine, declaring that no one would ever hear of her again. This fresh disappearance annoyed André greatly, for he wished to question Babirole further; but he did not show his annoyance, as he did not care to take Marbeuf entirely into his confidence. He merely asked his friend to be at his disposal after four o'clock, and Marbeuf at once promised not to leave home that day.

The hours seemed interminable to André, who spent them in utter solitude. However, at a quarter to four o'clock, he entered the doctor's reception room, and found that all but one or two patients had departed. The consultations were nearly over, so he didn't have long to wait. Dr. Valbrègue received him coldly, remarking even before André had seated himself: "You were called to Monsieur Vernelle's yesterday evening to attend his daughter. You will hardly be surprised to learn that she is very ill; but it might be well for you to understand that one may die of grief and mortification."

"Do not make me still more wretched, sir," replied Subligny. "I cannot speak to you on this very subject."

"To me! And why, if you please? I abstain from expressing any opinion on your conduct, and leave the task of criticising it to others."

"But I entreat you not to condemn me without a hearing." Dr. Valbrègue made no reply, but the stern expression of his face did not relax. "The reason I have ventured to apply to you, sir," continued André, "is because you alone can assist me in extricating myself from the terribly embarrassing and humiliating position in which I find myself."

"Excuse me, I am neither your relative nor your friend, and I fail to see—"

"I know that I have no claim upon you, but I attach great value to your esteem, and I think you will grant it me, if you will only consent to listen to me."

"I do not understand you in the least. Still, what have you to say to me?"

André, disconcerted by the doctor's curtness, felt that it would be best for him to speak briefly and to the point, instead of entering into a long explanation. "Do me the favour to read this letter," he said, handing the missive which had caused the scene in the mayor's office.

"You must be losing your senses, sir. I have not the slightest desire to meddle with your affairs, and—"

"This letter was written fifteen years ago by my father to Madame Vernelle. You know that she abandoned her husband and daughter. Read it, pray—"

The doctor still hesitated, but at last he took the letter, and hastily perused it. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "You are certain that your father wrote this?"

"I recognise his handwriting."

"What a terrible story. And so Mademoiselle Clémence is really your father's daughter. You did right to act as you did. But why did you wait till the last moment?"

"Because this letter only came into my possession at the mayor's office. Just then the mayor asked me the usual question, and my only resource was to answer 'No' as I did."

"Who brought you this letter?"

"A young girl—the one who recognised Marbeuf at the hospital."

"Well, Mademoiselle Vernelle's misfortune is irreparable, and I don't see of what use I can be to you in the affair."

"But would you not show this letter to Monsieur Vernelle," said André, timidly, "he would then cease reproaching me, and his daughter would approve of the course I took."

"Can you really think of my doing that," replied the doctor. "What! for the sake of your justification you wouldn't hesitate to break Monsieur Vernelle's heart, by robbing him of his last illusion. He adores his daughter, and has brought her up most lovingly. She has consoled him for her mother's misconduct, and he has only her left in the world. He has lost everything—position, wealth; his daughter remains, and you wish to let him know that she is not really his child? Why, it would be better to kill him outright, like that scamp who tried to poison him wished to do."

André hung his head. "What can I do, then?" he muttered.

"You must resign yourself, sir," rejoined the doctor, "resign yourself to your fate, hard as it may be to bear. There are times in life when real courage consists in braving public opinion. People will condemn you;

blame your brutality, and call you heartless. It is hard to bear, but it is better to sacrifice your pride rather than to commit an unworthy act. And if ever Monsieur Vernelle learns the truth, he will do you justice. Maybe he will learn it, as his wife is still alive, I believe. But how can she, knowing the facts, have consented to such a marriage?"

"She didn't know my name—at least she wrote to her husband's notary that she had signed the deed of consent without reading it, as she did not wish to know who was to be her daughter's husband."

"She must have lied."

"I rather believe she is mad."

"Why do you fancy that?"

"I saw her here in Paris. I went to summon her to go abroad, and give her consent to the marriage."

"But in that case she knew that your name was André Subigny."

"I called on her husband's behalf, and did not give my name."

"That was a strange course."

"It was suggested to me, and I now understand why."

"Who suggested it?"

"A man who has betrayed Monsieur Vernelle and hates him. The man knew the facts, and urged me to marry Clémence. He had devised this atrocious revenge for having been slighted as regards his own pretensions to her hand."

"And what is this scoundrel's name?"

"Chantepie—he was Monsieur Vernelle's cashier, and greatly contributed to his ruin."

"Why didn't you denounce him?"

André hesitated for a moment, but he had secretly resolved to confess the whole truth, so he boldly replied: "Because I was in his power. I think it best to tell you all. I have been guilty of a fault which I have certainly fully expiated. On the day I called on Monsieur Vernelle for the first time, I was left alone in his office for a moment. There was a large pile of bank-notes on the table, and I picked up one of the packages prompted by a foolish curiosity to see how much one hundred thousand francs would weigh. Monsieur Vernelle returned almost instantly, and in my fright I lost my senses completely, and slipped the money into my pocket. Chantepie was watching me through a sliding window at the time and saw me—"

"Commit theft," concluded Dr. Valbrègue, sorrowfully.

"You are not obliged to believe me, of course, but I swear to you that I had no intention of keeping the money."

"Then you should have returned it."

"I had not the courage to confess that I had touched it at the time, for Mademoiselle Vernelle was present, having entered the room with her father. Monsieur Vernelle did not perceive his loss, and I went away wondering how I could make restitution without any one discovering that I had tampered with the money. Marbeuf was waiting for me in a neighbouring café. I told him of my unfortunate blunder, and he offered to extricate me from my embarrassing position."

"In what way?" inquired the doctor, who was beginning to feel interested in the story.

"Marbeuf proposed that he should return the money that very evening and tell Monsieur Vernelle that he had picked it up in the court-yard."

"And you trusted the money to him?"

"Yes; but I have since bitterly regretted having adopted his suggestion, or you know what it cost him."

"I know now, but I did not suspect it before, for you never told me a word about this matter."

"I could not tell you without ruining my prospects. Now, having nothing left to hope for, I have nothing to conceal. Marbeuf went off, promising that he would join me again in an hour's time. I was staying with him at his rooms. I waited for him there all night, in vain. I was sure of his integrity, so I thought he had been robbed, and perhaps murdered, in the street. There seemed to be nothing left for me but to blow my brains out, and I was preparing to do so, when Chantepie unexpectedly made his appearance. He came to tell me that, having seen me make the bank-notes, he had paid the missing hundred thousand francs into my safe, out of his own pocket. I could not credit such wonderful generosity on his part. To convince me, however, he told me that he had been very well acquainted with my father, and that in saving me he was only repaying a debt of gratitude he owed him. He added that I could refund the amount at some future time, and he dictated an acknowledgment, which I was foolish enough to sign. I had not the slightest suspicion of his diabolical scheme, and yet, from that very day, he began to talk to me about marrying Mademoiselle Vernelle. A month later he imperiously ordered me to marry her, and he almost threatened to inform on me if I refused to comply with his instructions."

Dr. Valbrègue had listened as intelligent physicians always listen, weighing carefully each word of this narrative, which interested him more than one account, and without making any interruption. "Very well, I am satisfied in my own mind," he said, after a moment's silence. "It was his man who robbed your friend. His liberality did not cost him much."

"He!" exclaimed Subigny. "I think him fully capable of such a crime, but it is impossible. Marbeuf, who knew him by sight, would have recognised him."

"No, he wouldn't, supposing he was attacked from the rear; besides, even if he did recognise him at the time, you would know nothing about it, as your friend has since forgotten everything. But tell me, since he left the hospital, have you said anything to him about the bank-notes?"

"Yes, sir; and he distinctly remembers that I gave him the money at the restaurant where we dined together; but that is all. He is rather under the impression that he went to Monsieur Vernelle's house, but he is not sure."

"No matter; we have a starting point at last, and we will try to assist his memory. Is he at home now?"

"I saw him this morning, and he promised me that he would not leave home to-day."

"Then I will accompany you to the Rue Lamartine without delay. I was about to visit some patients, but they can wait awhile."

"What! you wish—"

"I wish to make an experiment—one that I should have made some time ago, had I been acquainted with all the circumstances of the case. I am going to make it in the interests of science, and you have even more reason to be anxious for its success than I have. I may not be able to restore you the happiness you have lost, but I hope to be able to deliver you from Monsieur Chantepie's clutches. Come, we still have a couple of hours of daylight left us. Let us turn them to the best possible account,"

Five minutes afterwards, the doctor and André were driving towards the Rue Lamartine. They were fortunate enough to meet Marbeuf at the door of his house. He had become weary of waiting for his friend, and was about to visit his favourite café. Dr. Valbrègue alighted, dismissed his carriage, and then said, point blank, to his former patient: "My dear friend, Monsieur Subligny has just told me the story of the missing bank-notes. I don't blame you for concealing it from me, but the time for concealment has past. You must go with me to the spot where you left your friend on the evening of the accident, and we may possibly succeed in solving the mystery."

Marbeuf could not refuse the doctor anything. Dr. Valbrègue had not only sworn to cure him, but had kindly lent him money; and never had a loan been more opportune than those five hundred francs, for André was in no situation to assist his friend. "I will second your efforts to the very best of my ability," replied Marbeuf, eagerly.

"Monsieur Subligny tells me that you have an indistinct recollection of first going to Monsieur Vernelle's house?" remarked the doctor.

"A very indistinct recollection, sir; though I must have gone, for I was anxious to fulfil the commission André had entrusted to me. You do not suspect me of appropriating the money, I hope?"

"No, certainly not. I know that you are an honest man. Still, it is fortunate for you that no one knows the story of the bank-notes. People would hardly fail to accuse you of having kept them. They were not found upon you, it is true, but folks might suspect you of having concealed them somewhere."

"Oh, sir!" muttered Marbeuf, in accents of sincere indignation, "I—"

"It would be absurd, as I know perfectly well. One cannot feign symptoms I myself verified. Besides, I am almost certain that it was Monsieur Vernelle's cashier who robbed you."

"How could he have known that I had the money in my possession? I wasn't acquainted with me."

"You forget that he was seated at the table near ours at the restaurant, and that he may have seen me give you the package," said André. "He handed you the money when we were finishing dinner, and while he was still there."

"I did not recollect this circumstance, and you have never reminded me of it since I left the hospital."

"Because I thought I was still under obligations to Chantepie. If Dr. Valbrègue has opened my eyes. Chantepie only lent me the money he had stolen from you."

"The rascal! If I were sure of that, I would wring his neck for him!"

"First help us to prove that he is the culprit," said the doctor.

They had been walking briskly along as they talked, and had now reached the Rue Lafayette. "There is the restaurant where we dined," said André, "and it was here, on the pavement, that we separated."

"Yes, I recognise the spot," murmured Marbeuf.

"Then, to reach Monsieur Vernelle's house," began Dr. Valbrègue, "we would have had to follow the Faubourg Montmartre as far as the Rue Bergère. There is no other route, unless one takes a very roundabout way."

"And I must have chosen the shortest, for I was in a great hurry. Monsieur Subligny was waiting for me."

"Very well, let us take the same route as you did. Don't try to ta—"

but observe the houses and shops carefully, and perhaps you will see some object that will put you on the track."

Dr. Valbrègue placed himself between the two friends, and they walked on, without exchanging a word, until they reached the corner of the Rue Bergère. There the doctor paused, and said: "You must have turned into this street. Haven't you noticed any familiar object since we started?"

"No, sir. The faubourg must, of course, present a very different aspect now; for when I started out, after dinner, it was dark."

"What day was it?"

"The 9th of February," replied André. "I recollect the date, because it was that of my arrival in Paris."

"And your friend must have left you at about eight o'clock?"

"At exactly half-past eight, I am sure, because I glanced at the time-piece over the door of the restaurant."

"So it isn't likely that Monsieur Marbeuf was molested in this neighbourhood, where the cafés remain open until two o'clock in the morning. We must proceed further. But in which direction? Monsieur Vernelle's doorkeeper can perhaps give us some information on the subject."

They resumed their walk, and Dr. Valbrègue, who had assumed command of the expedition, did not pause a min until they reached the banker's residence. "Do you know where you are?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes," replied Marbeuf. "This is certainly Monsieur Vernelle's house. There is the gateway at the corner of the Rue Rougemont, by which one enters when one has business at the bank. I have been there several times. But the offices are closed in the evening, so it isn't likely that I tried to gain admission there—"

"No, but at this gateway in the Rue Bergère, or, in other words, at the private entrance which I myself usually enter by."

Marbeuf made no reply. He was scrutinizing this gateway, and from his anxious countenance it was evident that he was striving to recall his recollections. "I remember now," he exclaimed, suddenly. "I entered here, and spoke to the doorkeeper. He has sandy whiskers."

"That is true," exclaimed both the doctor and André, in the same breath.

"I asked for Monsieur Vernelle, and the doorkeeper replied that he had gone to the theatre with his daughter."

"To what theatre?"

"I can't remember; but I do recollect that I immediately decided to go in search of him there."

"That is something. But there are a great many theatres in Paris, and it is scarcely probable that the doorkeeper will remember the answer he gave you six weeks ago. We must question Monsieur Vernelle on the subject, and in his present frame of mind—"

"I remember," cried André. "Mademoiselle Vernelle told me that her father took her to the 'Renaissance' that evening. She spoke of the operetta they were performing there. I am sure that I am not mistaken."

"And I don't doubt the accuracy of your memory. So we have a clue at last. But, unfortunately, there are several routes from the Rue Bergère to the 'Renaissance.' The question is to learn which one you chose."

"The most direct, undoubtedly."

"By way of the side streets, then, not by way of the boulevards. One question, though, before we go any further. If you had entered the theatre,

you would certainly remember it. The lights, the crowd, and the music could hardly have failed to make an impression on your mind."

"I recollect nothing of the kind."

"But you are sure that you started for the theatre?"

"Yes, I am sure of that."

"Then you must have been assaulted on the way. That seems strange—in the heart of Paris, and before nine o'clock in the evening! Such a thing could not possibly have happened on the boulevards, so we must follow the route leading through the side streets."

"There is only one—that leading along the Rue de l'Échiquier."

"Let us take the Rue de l'Échiquier, then. It is less frequented in the evening than the neighbouring streets, as it is lined with packers' shops which close at nightfall. Come, gentlemen."

They walked together in the direction of the Faubourg Poissonnière, and when they had passed it, Marbeuf became more thoughtful and observant. On passing the massive portals of the Academy of Music, he paused for an instant, as if struck by some recollection; but after reflecting, decided to proceed on his way. In the Rue de l'Échiquier, the sound of the packers' hammers seemed to arouse him, and after glancing at the shops, he muttered "It certainly seems to me that I passed this way." Again, a little further on, he said, musingly: "Yes, here is the place where I was obliged to step out into the street because the sidewalk was obstructed by several large cases that some men were taking from a dray."

"Then we are on the right track," remarked the doctor. "In fact, we cannot be far from the end of our journey, for you couldn't have been assaulted in the Faubourg Saint Denis, and we are very near it now. This street is a very short one."

They had not gone twenty steps beyond the corner of the Rue Hauteville when Marbeuf suddenly paused once more. There was an open trench across the foot pavement, and the doctor at first thought that this was what prevented his patient from advancing. But Marbeuf exclaimed: "I was here."

"What! you fell into that hole?" said Dr. Valbrègue. "You must be mistaken. It is surrounded by boards, and you would have had to throw yourself into it purposely. Besides, that was six weeks ago. The work could not have been begun at that time."

"Who knows?" murmured Subligny. "Some workmen are not very expeditious. See, there isn't a single one at work here now."

"I am sure of what I say," rejoined Marbeuf. "At the bottom of the trench there is a gas-pipe against which my head must have struck. But at that time there was no hoardings about the opening."

"But it seems strange that you did not see the hole, as there is a street lamp close by which must have been lighted at the time," remarked the doctor.

"I may have made a mistake."

"Then the bank notes may have fallen from your pocket, and been picked up by some one."

"That is possible, though I recollect that I pushed the package well into my pocket."

"But you must have been picked out of the hole, and it is hardly likely that any one would have taken the trouble to transport you to the Boulevard des Invalides. It certainly could not have been here that you fell—if fall you did," added the doctor, doubtfully.

He was again beginning to wonder if Marbeuf might not be trying to deceive them. Marbeuf, however, did not seem to have the slightest suspicion of this fact, but stood leaning over the railing, round the opening, measuring the depth of the trench. Several loafers had also paused, probably mistaking the trio for contractors, who had come to investigate the progress of the work. Among these loungers there was one who scrutinised Marbeuf with marked attention. This inquisitive person wore a costume which indicated his calling beyond any possible doubt—his glazed hat and red waistcoat proclaiming him to be a driver in the employ of the Paris Cab Company. Marbeuf, who was gazing down into the trench, did not notice that this man was looking at him; but Valbrègue and André were both surprised at the persistency with which he stared at their companion.

There was no vehicle standing near, so the man must be off duty, and taking advantage of his leisure time to stroll about. Suddenly leaving the group of by-standers, he approached Marbeuf, and remarked, very unceremoniously: "Ah, well! citizen, you seem to be all right again."

"What do you mean? I am not acquainted with you," replied Marbeuf, curtly.

"That doesn't surprise me. You didn't take much notice of anything or anybody the evening I met you. Besides, that was, at least, six weeks ago. But I recognised you instantly—and this trench, too."

Marbeuf did not understand a word of the reply; but Dr. Valbrègue, who was more discerning, scented some valuable information, and so he said to the driver: "Step this way, my friend. I should like to talk to you."

"Certainly, as much as you like. I am not at work to-day, and have nothing to do but take a stroll."

Marbeuf and Sublimy followed the pair a short distance out of the hearing of the by-standers, and the doctor, catching hold of the cabman by one of the buttons of his overcoat, then exclaimed: "Now, my good fellow, you must tell us how you became acquainted with this gentleman."

"Willingly: for I certainly did him no harm—quite the contrary. Well, this was how it happened: One evening, in the early part of last month, I was going to the stand in the Rue de Trévisé, after taking two ladies to the Porte Saint Martin theatre, when, on passing this trench, my horse took fright and shied. Just as I gave him a cut with the whip, I heard some one shout to me, and saw a man's head appear above the level of the pavement. 'Some fellow has fallen into that hole, and can't get out,' I said to myself; so I drew near the foot-pavement and got down from the box to help the fellow out, for I thought if such an accident had happened to me, I should be very glad of a helping hand. But as it was, the man who had shouted to me wasn't drunk; it was another man who was with him."

"What! another man who was with him?"

"Yes; that gentleman there with you—he was lying at the bottom of the trench. But ask him to tell you the particulars. He was unconscious when we dragged him out, but his friend must have told him all about the affair the next day."

Marbeuf opened his eyes in astonishment. He did not know what to reply, but a light was beginning to dawn upon his mind. Dr. Valbrègue hastily proceeded with the investigation. "Then you helped the gentleman out?" he inquired.

"Yes; and we had no little trouble in doing it; for the gentleman is

rather heavy, and he could not help himself a bit. I thought, at first, that he was dead, and, indeed, it is a wonder that he was not killed by his fall. He must have a tough head !”

“Well, what followed ?”

“Well, his companion remarked to me : ‘It isn’t surprising. He drank a whole bottle of brandy this evening ; and, of course, he could neither walk nor see straight. I managed to get him along as far as here, after leaving the wine-shop ; but he suddenly let go of my arm, and nearly dragged me down in the trench with him. It would have served him right if I had left him there ; and I should not have succeeded in getting down into the hole to drag him out if the workmen hadn’t left a ladder near by. ‘But he can’t walk. What shall we do with him?’ I asked. ‘We will take him home in your cab,’ was the answer. ‘He lives rather far from here ; but I will hire your trap for an hour, and, after I have handed him over to his doorkeeper, you can bring me back here, and I will give you ten francs for your trouble.’”

“I felt sure that I was taken somewhere in a vehicle,” muttered Marbeuf.

“Ten francs are not to be sneezed at, so we hoisted the gentleman in the trap. His friend stepped in after him, first telling me to drive to the corner of the Rue de Babylone and the Boulevard des Invalides.”

“At last !” muttered the doctor, who, having foreseen this reply, had found it difficult to restrain his impatience.

“That’s where you hang out, is it not, sir ?” said the driver to Marbeuf, laughing. “By jingo ! you were in no condition to get home without help, and your friend certainly rendered you a great service. He took good care, too, that you shouldn’t get into trouble with your wife. When I reached the corner of the boulevard, he made me stop, and said : ‘Wait for me here, and I will take him home alone. He lives just round the corner. He is a married man, and his wife is perhaps waiting for him at the window. If she saw him brought home in a cab, she might rate him roundly ; but he is with me, she will say nothing. The doorkeeper will help him up to the third floor, and to-morrow morning I will call and inquire how he is getting along.’”

“Was there any perceptible change in the gentleman’s condition ?” inquired the doctor.

“He seemed a little better ; but his friend almost had to carry him. He was beginning to talk a little, but I couldn’t understand what he said. About ten minutes afterwards the other gentleman returned, and I drove him to a café on the Boulevard Poissonnière.”

“Would you recognize this café ?”

“Certainly I should, as readily as I should recognize the gentleman himself. When I once see a man, I never forget his phiz. Didn’t you notice that I recognized this gentleman here as soon as I saw him ? Besides, I do fall in with such customers every day—one who comes out of a sewer, and another who pays like a millionaire !”

“Then you recollect the other gentleman’s face, I suppose ? What kind of a man was he ?”

“He was a tall man with a full beard, and about forty years old. I should say ; in short, a very gentlemanly-looking person. However, when he came up out of the hole, he was wearing a blouse. He explained the fact by saying that he always wore one when he went on a spree. He left it in my cab—made me a present of it, indeed. Then I saw that he was

dressed in a full suit of black, like a notary. But this gentleman here must know him ; so I don't understand why you ask me all these questions."

"Here are twenty francs, my friend," said the doctor. "Now, show me the café you drove to."

"Certainly !" exclaimed the driver, pocketing the gold coin delightedly.

"I shall earn my money very easily, for the place is not far from here."

"Ah, well ! do me the favour to walk on in advance ; I won't lose sight of you."

The cabman needed no urging, and when he was some distance ahead, Dr. Valbrègue turned to his companions, and said : "Do you doubt the accuracy of my diagnosis now ? I declared, from the first, that the accident was a fall ; that the wounded man had partially regained consciousness, and been able to talk, and even walk, but had afterwards relapsed into the condition in which he was situated when brought to the hospital. We now know what took place. The man who robbed you left you on the Boulevard des Invalides, and it is a miracle that you did not freeze to death, as he hoped you would. He must have pushed you into that trench."

"I recollect now that I was followed by a man in a blouse ; and it seems to me that he jostled me as he passed."

"He must have gone down into the trench, searched your pockets, and taken the bank-notes and your papers from you."

"I wonder why he did not leave me there ?"

"Because he wished to mislead anyone who tried to investigate the matter. He saw that you were not dead ; but he didn't expect you to recover, and if your body was found a long way from your home, it would be taken straight to the Morgue. Then, even if it were identified, no one would suspect that you had died of injuries inflicted by falling into a trench in the Rue de l'Écluse. All this, to my mind, proves most conclusively that Monsieur Vernelle's cashier was the thief. He saw you receive the money at the restaurant, and knew perfectly well where Monsieur Subligny had obtained it ; so he made his plans accordingly, and lost no time in carrying them into execution. Monsieur Subligny will explain to you what his plan was, if you do not already know. It is necessary now to secure one last bit of proof. If the cashier is in the habit of frequenting the café where this driver is taking us, we shall soon be absolutely certain ; and when we are satisfied on the point, leave all the rest to me."

André and Marbeuf exchanged glances. They were too deeply agitated to speak. Their guide had ascended the Rue d'Hauteville, and turned to the right, on to the Boulevard Beine-Nouvelle. On reaching the Faubourg Poissonnière, he paused, instead of crossing it ; and an instant later he hastily concealed himself behind a newspaper kiosk. The trio in the rear, surprised at this manœuvre, quickened their steps to overtake him, and the doctor asked him why he was concealing himself. "Because I now guess who you are," replied the coachman.

"And who are we, pray ?"

"Detectives, of course ; and I don't want my fare of the other night to know that it was I who denounced him. He is over there, and if he saw me in company with you—"

"Where is he ?"

"Sitting there in front of that café. There are two of them—a dark and a light-complexioned man. The dark fellow is the one."

"It is indeed Chantepie !" muttered Subligny.

"And I know his companion," said the doctor. "I am satisfied now

that Monsieur Chantepie is a would-be murderer as well as a thief. Gentle men, you must allow me to manage the affair."

"What, sir! do you mean to talk to this man?" asked André.

"I don't merely mean to talk to him, but to make him confess the whole of his villainy," replied the doctor. "You give me *carte blanche*, I suppose?"

"Certainly, but—"

"Make no objections. We have no time to lose, and I might never find so good an opportunity again. Do you see a small café there on the other side of the boulevard, directly opposite the one where the cashier is sitting?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, do me the favour to seat yourself at one of the tables there, in company with your friend and this worthy cabman, who, I am sure, won't decline some refreshment."

"That's true!" exclaimed the cabman, "for I am terribly thirsty."

"You are not to lose sight of me, mind," resumed Dr. Valbrègue, "while I am talking with monsieur—monsieur—what's his name? You told me just now, but I have forgotten."

"Jules Chantepie."

"Very good. Now, when you see me take off my hat, all three of you are to cross the street and join me. But tell me, Monsieur Subligny, can this Chantepie produce any other proofs against you than your receipt?"

"He entered unexpectedly, just as I was writing to Marbeuf, and he took possession of my partially completed letter. In this letter I allude to the bank-notes taken from Monsieur Vernelle's office. He also appropriated the revolver with which I had intended to shoot myself."

"How did he know that Mademoiselle Clémence was really your father's daughter?"

"He was Madame Vernelle's confidant and still advises her."

"Ah! And no doubt she is anxious to become a widow. Well, one word more. Are you acquainted with the individual who is drinking some absinthe with the cashier?"

"No, but I saw them talking together one day not far from Monsieur Vernelle's house."

"Naturally. They must be very intimate. He is the messenger of the chemist who makes up Monsieur Vernelle's medicines. I questioned him myself, in his employer's presence. You know that I made an investigation after the discovery of the attempted poisoning. It was futile, but we shall arrive at the result by a different route. All roads lead to Rome, you know. I presume you thoroughly understand my instructions, gentlemen, so you had better go."

This conversation had taken place behind the newspaper kiosk, and Chantepie had not perceived the party. Subligny, Marbeuf, and the cabman crossed the boulevard, in compliance with the orders of the doctor, who walked slowly towards the café where M. Vernelle's cashier and his companion were enjoying a friendly glass together.

Dr. Valbrègue had seen Chantepie several times at the banker's house, but he had never spoken to him; and he flattered himself that Chantepie would not recognize him, at least not at the first glance. Assuming the indifferent air of a promenader who is merely strolling about to kill time, he sauntered towards the café, but, unfortunately, the weather being cold and foggy, pedestrians and customers were rare, and Chantepie and his companion were almost alone outside the establishment. The tables

either side of them were unoccupied, and they had probably chosen this place so that no one might overhear their conversation. They must also have been on the watch, for the chemist's messenger suddenly perceived the doctor. As he no doubt did not care to obtain a nearer view of him, he whispered a few words to his companion, and then rose up and walked off hastily in the direction of the Boulevard Montmartre. Chantepie did not move, but he began to light a cigar. This is one of the easiest ways to conceal one's face, and he probably hoped that Dr. Valbrègue would pass by without noticing him. But the doctor walked straight up to him, dropped unceremoniously on to a chair beside him, and said, point-blank: "Good-day, sir. You are Monsieur Vernelle's cashier, I believe?"

"I was, but I have resigned my situation now that my employer is going out of business. Haven't I the honour of speaking to Dr. Valbrègue?"

"The same, sir. But it is not with you that I have business. I wished to speak to that young man who walked off on seeing me. He is a friend of yours, I think?"

"No, sir. I know him slightly, but that is all."

"I also know him. He is in the employ of a chemist who does not show sufficient care in making up my prescriptions. He narrowly escaped poisoning Monsieur Vernelle, quite recently, thereby placing you in a very embarrassing position."

"Me!" exclaimed Chantepie.

"Yes, you! The bromide my patient took passed through the hands of the man who was just now drinking with you—and through yours as well."

"That is false. I should like to know what fool gave you this information."

"I have not the slightest objection to telling you that it was Monsieur Vernelle's secretary."

"Subligny! I suspected as much. It is a wonder that he does not accuse me of putting the poison into the bromide."

"He does formally accuse you of it."

"He! This is really too much. A rascal I saved from the assizes!"

"What, sir? Why, I took him for an honourable man."

"He is a thief, and I have proofs of it in my pocket. So he dares to slander me! Ah, well! his assurance shall cost him dear."

"Excuse me, sir. The situation is a very grave one. I had my reasons for believing what Monsieur Subligny said; but if you can prove to me that he himself has been guilty of a crime, I shall no longer attach the slightest importance to his statements. Will you, therefore, have the kindness to specify the nature of his crime?"

Chantepie hesitated for an instant. The doctor's questions might conceal some trap. But it was necessary to end the discussion then and there, and Chantepie was satisfied that no one could contradict what he was about to say. "Upon my word! this scoundrel who is trying so hard to injure me, deserves no further consideration at my hands!" he exclaimed. "His vile history is as follows: On the day he first presented himself at my employer's establishment, with a letter of recommendation, he was left alone for a few moments in M. Vernelle's private office. There were eight hundred thousand francs in bank-notes lying upon the table. He picked up a package that contained one hundred thousand francs and slipped it into his pocket. There is a small window between my office and M. Vernelle's room. It was partly open at the time, and I saw Subligny commit the theft. I might have gone in and collared him, but I had com-

passion on him, and allowed him to go away unmolested. I knew where he lived, and early the next morning I went to see him. I found him writing a letter in which he confessed the theft, and announced his intention of committing suicide. A pistol lay beside him, on the table. I thought he was overwhelmed with remorse. His apparent misery touched me, and I offered to refund out of my own pocket, the money which he had stolen. Ah! he needed no urging to induce him to accept my offer. An hour afterwards I placed in the safe one hundred thousand francs that I shall never see again, for he has no fortune, and he has lost his situation."

"It was certainly an act of generosity that does you honour."

"You see how it has been rewarded, however."

"And it was the more noble on your part, as you are not rich, I believe."

"I had, by untiring industry, amassed a modest competence, but nearly all my savings have gone in the way I mentioned."

"You were very imprudent, for you only knew M. Subligny from having seen him commit a theft."

"I allowed myself to be carried too far by my natural kindness of heart. I admit, but at that time I did not really expect to lose my money. Subligny is a very handsome fellow. He had taken a desperate fancy to Vernelle's daughter, and I thought he would marry her some day. But Vernelle is now a ruined man; besides, the match—which was regarded as a settled thing—was broken off at the very last moment—in the mayor's office in fact. However, Subligny shall pay dearly for the slanderous reports he is circulating about me. I shall not get my money back, as he hasn't a penny; but I have the means of exposing him in my possession, and I shall not hesitate to make use of them."

"Do you know why the match was broken off?" inquired the doctor after a short silence.

"I suppose Subligny did not care for the girl without a dowry, and the dowry having vanished with Vernelle's fortune, Subligny backed out of the engagement."

"I think it was from some other cause. But to return to this noble act of yours. I really cannot admire it sufficiently. Still, I fail to understand why you should have been compelled to make the amount good. Subligny certainly had not had time to spend it between evening and morning. Why did you not then and there compel him to make restitution?"

"He pretended that he had intrusted the money to a friend who had volunteered to return it to M. Vernelle in the course of the evening. The friend has never been seen or heard of since, and I am satisfied that the two scoundrels had conspired together to retain possession of the stolen money."

"This friend's name was Marbeuf, was it not?"

"Yes, you are right. His name was Marbeuf. Subligny was staying with him at the time."

"Then you are fully satisfied of his complicity?"

"Not fully, as no one knows what has become of him."

"You are very much mistaken. I know. He was under my charge in my ward at the Necker Hospital, for more than a month. He had met with a severe fall, and had lost his memory entirely, but I have cured him, and he now distinctly recollects all that happened to him."

Chantepie turned pale, and beckoned to the waiter, drawing out his purse as he did so. It was quite evident that he did not wish to hear any more. "Will you go with me to see him?" inquired the doctor, rising up and raising his hat.

It was the signal agreed upon with André.

"Why should I?" stammered Chantepie. "I don't know the gentleman, nor am I at all anxious to make his acquaintance; besides, I am really obliged to leave you now—to my great regret, I assure you." He had risen to his feet, and thrown a coin on the table.

"I can understand your anxiety to go," said Dr. Valbrègue, ironically, "but I insist upon introducing you to Monsieur Marbeuf. You won't be detained long, for here he comes."

Chantepie glanced in the direction indicated, and saw Subligny, Marbeuf, and the old man crossing the street: then, instantly realising that he was lost, he suddenly turned as if about to run off, but Dr. Valbrègue caught him firmly by the arm, and said imperiously: "If you try to make your escape, I will call a policeman. You may attempt to deny your guilt, but there will be three of us against you, and it will go hard with you if you compel us to take you before a commissary of police. Take my advice, and don't stir. It is the only chance you have left of escaping the penalty of the law, for I hope we shall succeed in adjusting the matter satisfactorily to all parties. I am not at all anxious to send you to prison."

Chantepie was too much overcome with surprise to reply, and the three witnesses having come up, the doctor proceeded with his examination. Turning first of all to the cabman he inquired: "Is this the gentleman you drove from the Rue de l'Écliquier to the corner of the Rue de Babylone and the Boulevard des Invalides, one evening in February?"

"I can't say the contrary," growled the driver, who seemed but little pleased to serve as the auxiliary of people whom he mistook for detectives. "Especially as I still have the blouse the gentleman left in my vehicle," he added.

"Very well, my friend. Where do you live?"

"At La Villette. Here is my number," replied the man, presenting one of the printed cards with which the Cab Company supplies each of its drivers.

"That will do, my man. We shall have no further need of you, I think. You may go now."

The driver lost no time in availing himself of the permission.

"Now, Monsieur Marbeuf," continued the doctor, putting the driver's card carefully away in his pocket-book, "will you kindly relate your nocturnal adventures to Monsieur Chantepie?"

Surrounded by opponents so fully armed at all points, Chantepie thought less of defending himself than of concluding the compromise to which Dr. Valbrègue had alluded. Marbeuf, on the contrary, could only, with the greatest difficulty, repress his desire to seize his enemy by the throat. "What is the use of relating them to him?" he exclaimed, angrily: "he is far better acquainted with them than I am, for he not only robbed, but tried to murder me."

"Prove this to a magistrate if you can," replied Chantepie, shrugging his shoulders, for he was now beginning to regain some of his wonted assurance.

"I will undertake to prove it if you wish me to do so," retorted the doctor. "Monsieur Marbeuf recognizes you, and you recognize him. We will now let that account stand for the present, and pass on to another that concerns Monsieur Subligny only." Marbeuf took the hint, and drew a few steps aside. "And now," continued Dr. Valbrègue, with an amount of composure that a veteran magistrate might have envied, "the moment has

come to confess that you made this pretended loan merely to get Monsieur Subligny completely in your power, and so to further the diabolical scheme of revenge which you had long been plotting."

"You forget that I only did all I could to further his own wishes," sneered Chantepie. "But whether I was actuated by the motives you impute to me or not is a matter of very little consequence, I fancy. The question is, What are you aiming at?"

"You must surrender to me the receipt which Monsieur Subligny signed and the letter you took from him."

"Never! I will not surrender the only weapons I have to defend myself with. I assure you if you go too far I shall not hesitate to make use of them."

"Take care. I still have three powders of bromide and strychnine at my house; and the chemist who prepared them will help me to prove that they passed through your hands. A word from me would send you before the assizes; and I can find witnesses who will explain at whose instigation you tried to get Monsieur Vernelle out of the way. He was in his wife's way, you know. How much did she pay you for this attempted murder?"

Chantepie hung his head. He realised that the doctor knew all, and he gave up all hope in his secret heart, though he still made a show of resistance. "I don't care particularly about retaining Monsieur Subligny's receipt," he muttered; "it is absolutely worthless; but I don't clearly understand what I should gain by handing it to you."

"You will secure permission to go and get hanged elsewhere."

"What do you mean by this insolence?"

"I mean that we will not prevent you from leaving Paris, or even France and that we shall enter no complaint against you. I might accuse you of an attempt to poison your employer; and Monsieur Marbeuf might accuse you of theft and an attempt to murder him; but we will be silent."

"What guarantee shall I have that you won't denounce me?"

"My word, and that must suffice."

"Your word; yes, but the word of these gentlemen does not inspire me with any confidence whatever."

"Content yourself with mine, then. I will be responsible for them. Quick, now, hand me the papers."

"I will send them to you this evening. I haven't them with me now."

"You have a very short memory. A few moments ago, when I first accosted you, you declared that Monsieur Subligny was a thief. You knew perfectly well that the charge was false, and to convince me, you added that you had written proofs of the fact upon your person. These proofs are, of course, the receipt and the letter you appropriated. Had I asked to see them then, you would have shown them to me. Denial is useless. Comply with my request immediately. I have no time to waste. If you refuse, one of these gentlemen will escort you home and keep you a prisoner there while I pay a visit to the public prosecutor. In my capacity as professor of the faculty and a hospital physician, my testimony will have some weight in such a matter; and there is little doubt but what you will be in prison before to-night."

Chantepie was foaming with rage; but he had not completely lost his senses, and he felt that it would be much better to yield than to incur the risk of arrest. His desire to wreak vengeance on Subligny did not equal his anxiety to escape the probable consequences of a criminal trial. Besides, what good would it do him to ruin Subligny's reputation now that his scheme had failed? It was Vernelle and his daughter that Chantepie

wished to injure, and they were in no way connected with this matter now, as the marriage had been broken off; neither did it cost him much to return a receipt for money which he had not disbursed, for, thanks to his connection with the treacherous Bertaud, he was now rich. "I shall not quarrel with an influential man like yourself about such a trifle," he said, carelessly. "Here is the receipt, and the letter too. The revolver is at my house. I will return it to its owner to-morrow."

Dr. Valbrègue took the proffered papers, and silently handed them to Subligny, who hastily glanced over them, and then tore them into fragments, which he scattered to the winds.

"You can now relieve us of your presence," remarked the doctor, turning to M. Vernelle's former cashier. "I shall pay no further attention to you unless you take it into your head to trouble my friends again. In that case, I shall consider myself released from my promise; and I did not deceive you when I told you that I had the bromide powders, besides, you know that I have the cabman's number."

Chantepie pulled his hat down over his eyes, and turning upon his heels walked away. Marbeuf, who had remained a short distance off during the conversation, now approached, exclaiming: "What! you had him in your power, and yet you let him go?"

"What do we want of the scoundrel now that we have made it impossible for him to injure your friend?" responded Dr. Valbrègue. "Forget him. You are cured; Monsieur Subligny has regained possession of documents which might have compromised him. What more can you ask?"

"Nothing, sir," replied André, in a voice full of emotion—"nothing, except to thank you from the bottom of my heart. You have saved us both—Marbeuf from madness, and me from dishonour."

"It is my business to save people," replied the doctor, gaily, "and I don't confine my attention exclusively to the sick. I have remedies for diseased minds as well; and as I am not in the habit of deserting my patients as soon as I have set them on their feet again, I have been interesting myself in your behalf, my dear Number Nineteen; in fact, I have secured you a position with a merchant who will give you a salary of six thousand francs a year to begin with."

Marbeuf, amazed by this good news, could hardly find words in which to express his gratitude.

"As for you, sir," continued Dr. Valbrègue, turning to Subligny, "on the occasion when you came to the hospital to recognise your friend and told me that you meant to marry Mademoiselle Clémence, despite her father's ruin, it occurred to me to do something to improve your prospects. I had long known the Vernelles, and I did not like that Mademoiselle Clémence's husband should be reduced to want. The situation has changed, still there is no reason why I should modify my earlier intentions. This is what I had found for you—and what is still at your disposal—a situation at Havre. You will be in your native town and near your mother. The position I speak of is in the house of a shipping merchant, and it is a lucrative one. He knows you by hearsay; and I assured him of my willingness to be responsible for you. He promises you a prosperous future—and he has no daughter," added the worthy doctor, smiling. André's face clouded at this allusion, and Dr. Valbrègue, noticing the fact, exclaimed: "Don't take offence. You have no real cause to reproach yourself. Monsieur Vernelle's affairs are being satisfactorily adjusted—I have

received this information from a reliable source—and he will have enough left to take him to some foreign land, and enable him to begin life anew there; he is extremely anxious to do so on account of the scandal caused by his wife's recent return to Paris. His daughter, I am sure, will eventually find a husband worthy of her. So take heart, and bless the hand that saved you from a violent death. What has become of your fair preserver?"

"And mine as well," murmured Marbeuf. "But for her I should still be in the hospital."

"She has disappeared," replied Subligny, sadly.

"You really ought to make every possible effort to find her," replied Dr. Valbrègue. "Call and see me to-morrow, both of you, and bring me news of her. It was the same young person, I believe, who warned Vernelle of the attempt to poison him. She richly deserves your gratitude; there is no question about that; and providing she is a good and virtuous girl, why, if I were in your place, I think that I should acquit myself of my obligations by marrying her." With this rather startling conclusion, the doctor took leave of the two friends, without waiting for André's reply.

XII.

THE apartments M. Vernelle had secured for his secretary in the Rue Rougemont were charming, but they had not brought happiness to their occupant, by any means. Still, André's misfortunes really dated from the night spent in Marbeuf's modest lodgings. After his change of quarters, fortune had even seemed to smile upon him for a while; but this was only the transient brightening of a clouded sky—one of those brief calms that precede and presage a tempest. A thunder-bolt had suddenly fallen, blighting several lives; and of the victims, André was certainly neither the most innocent nor the most deserving of pity. He had a culpable act upon his conscience; but thanks to Dr. Valbrègue's energetic intervention, he now no longer had any reason to dread the consequences of a rash deed which might have cost him his honour. M. Vernelle, who had, of his own accord, embarked upon the dangerous ocean of speculation, had only himself to blame for his ruin, for had he abstained from gambling at the Bourse, a treacherous subordinate could not have impoverished him. And he was not above reproach as a father; for he had done all in his power to bring about the marriage between Clémence and André whom he scarcely knew. Clémence alone was guiltless, and yet her life was broken. What fate awaited her? Exile with M. Vernelle, who might not live many years longer, and then utter loneliness might follow. André would have been glad to restore her past happiness, but he was powerless; and pending his departure for Havre, he spent most of his time shut up alone in his rooms, brooding over his misfortunes. What could have become of Babiole, he wondered, and what had befallen her prior to the trying scene at the mayor's office?

André only knew what Marbeuf had told him, and Marbeuf knew but little. Babiole had declared that Subligny would never hear of her again, and she had again deserted her modest rooms, almost immediately after the scene at the wedding. André could not forget the services she had rendered him, and that she had saved M. Vernelle, as well as Marbeuf. As he thought of all this devotion, other facts occurred to him. He recollected

certain looks and gestures which had passed unheeded at the time, or rather whose meaning he had obstinately refused to understand. But now he could no longer close his eyes to their significance. He was obliged to admit that Babiole had certainly loved him; and he sometimes asked himself if he had acted wisely in disdaining this faithful love, and if this truly charming girl would not be a much better helpmate for him, in his present humble condition, than any of the fashionable young ladies with whom he had associated in former years, or with whom he might still associate? They had no doubt never strayed from the path of virtue, but was not this due rather to the fact that they had never been exposed to the temptations that assail poor work-girls, than to any merit of their own? The question now was to ascertain if Babiole had, indeed, yielded to temptation, as seemed only too probable, from the circumstances of her first disappearance, when she had left the house with Madame Divet, only to return there for a few hours after her melodramatic re-appearance at the wedding. She alone was in a position to prove the contrary, and no one had any idea where she was.

Marbeuf, who still resided in the Rue Lamartine, could furnish no information about her. More eager than André, who seemed to be in no haste to leave for Havre, Marbeuf had entered upon his new duties, and now devoted his whole time to his employer. André only saw him in the evening. He had learned, from his friend, that there was no danger of M. Vernelle's becoming a bankrupt; but that he would, on the contrary, still possess a small sum, as there had been a considerable advance in prices before the end of March, so that the settlement proved much less disastrous than had been apprehended. Marbeuf also told André that he had heard that Bertaud had retired from business with an ample fortune, and that his accomplice, Chantepie, was about to leave Paris for Rouen, his native town—to take charge of a commercial agency, in which he hoped to turn his peculiar talents to good account. But Marbeuf was altogether ignorant of Babiole's whereabouts, and did not feel much anxiety on the subject, as he had no suspicions of André's interest in her.

The two friends were utterly unlike in temperament, André being excitable and enthusiastic, Marbeuf, matter-of-fact and prosaic. André, who was well aware of his friend's lack of sentiment, was almost afraid to question him, much less to admit that Madame Divet's pretty employee was beginning to hold a very enviable place in his esteem and affection. Several days passed, and enforced inaction began to have a very depressing effect upon André's spirits. His departure for Havre could not be much longer delayed if he wished to profit by M. Valbregue's recommendation, so he began to make the necessary preparations. He had sent M. Vernelle a letter in which, without making any attempt to excuse his conduct at the wedding, which had been occasioned he said by an imperative necessity, he stated that he was obliged to leave Paris, and requested the banker to dispose as he pleased of the furniture of the apartment in the Rue Rougemont; and he was now only waiting for a reply to this letter to leave the city in which he had suffered so much. He waited two days, but waited in vain. Then coming to the conclusion that M. Vernelle had decided to hold no further communication with him, he resolved to pack his trunk and depart. He decided upon his train, and invited Marbeuf to a farewell dinner, being anxious to spend his last evening in Paris with his friend. The latter was to call for him at half past six, but it was scarcely five o'clock when André heard a ring at the bell. Marbeuf alone was in the habit of calling,

and at that hour he must still be at his office. So André thought that his visitor might be M. Vernelle, and hastened to open the door, his heart beating fast at the mere idea of an interview with his benefactor. It was not the banker, however, but a tall, distinguished-looking man whom Subigny did not at first recognize. "Are you Monsieur André Subigny?" inquired the stranger rather haughtily.

"Yes, sir. To whom have I the honour of speaking?"

"I am Prince Lipetsk. Though you may not know me, you must at least know my name."

André started back in surprise. It was, indeed, the Russian nobleman whom he had seen in company with the Baroness d'Orbec at the Opéra Comique, and afterwards at her house in the Rue Galilée. What could the prince desire? wondered André. "I recognise you now," he replied, "but I can not imagine to what I am indebted for your visit."

"I called to request an interview which may prove a rather lengthy one, but when you have heard what I have to say, you will not regret having granted my request."

"Come in, sir," said André; and he thereupon ushered the prince into the little parlour where most of his time had been spent since the catastrophe, offered him a chair, took a seat opposite him, and exclaimed: "Speak, sir, I am listening."

"Will you permit me to first light a cigarette?" asked the Russian, drawing an elegant case from his pocket.

"Suit yourself, sir," replied André, who, fancying that the prince suspected him of having saved Babiole from his clutches, half expected a challenge; "I have consented to receive you," he added, "though it is not customary for two combatants to make arrangements in person for such an affair as that which brings you here."

"Do you suppose that I have come here to challenge you!" exclaimed the prince, bursting into a hearty laugh.

"If it is not that which has brought you here, what can it be?"

"A number of matters that affect you deeply. I have no grievance against you, but you probably think that you have one against me, and I am anxious to undeceive you. I am also anxious that you should not suspect a person who possesses my highest esteem, and who certainly has a right to yours, of conduct which has always been far from her thoughts."

"Explain yourself more clearly, if you wish me to understand you."

"With the greatest pleasure. I will begin by saying that I know who you are, and all that has happened by my own fault. I sinned, however, chiefly through ignorance, and had I known that the gratification of a mere caprice would have—"

"The facts—confine yourself to them, if you please," interrupted André, impatiently.

"I am coming to them; and to prove that I am thoroughly well-informed, allow me to say that I am perfectly aware that you were concealed behind a curtain on the evening I called at a certain house in the Rue Galilée—that you overheard the whole of my conversation with the baroness, and that you there saw the young girl whose beauty made such a deep impression upon me. It was Yolande's maid who apprised me of these facts, after the departure of her mistress. She could not tell me your name, as she was ignorant of it, but I will presently explain how I discovered it. I will not speak of my connection with the so-called Baroness d'Orbec—that connection ceased as soon as I learned that her husband was living, and that

she had abandoned her daughter. I shall never see her again, and if I have consented to settle an annuity upon her, it is only because she can hardly be considered accountable for her actions, and because, left to her own resources, she might sink to the lowest depths of degradation and shame."

André listened, in silence, to these painful explanations, and he certainly deserved some credit for not interrupting them, for he was suffering terribly. "I will now return to the subject of the young girl before referred to," resumed the prince, with imperturbable calmness. "You have a very poor opinion of me; and I don't wonder at it. But to judge me justly, you must know something of the life I have led from my earliest boyhood. I was still but a child, when my father left me in possession of an immense fortune, and I have never known any law save my own fancy. In Paris, where I have often sojourned, I have only had to express a wish to have it instantly gratified. An humble work-girl has convinced me, however, that some things cannot be bought in your country." André started, but he did not open his lips. "Yes, sir," continued the Russian, "nothing could tempt this girl to do wrong, and the test was complete. My conscience also shall be complete, for I impose it upon myself as a sort of penance for the unworthy part I played in this affair. That very same evening, Yolande sent her milliner to see me. The woman proved to be an unscrupulous creature, who was ready and willing to do almost anything for the sake of a little money, and the following day she enticed the poor girl to her house, dragged some beverage which she gave her, and with the assistance of my majordomo, whom I have since dismissed, had her taken to my house near the Parc Monceau."

"And you dare to confess this!" exclaimed Subigny, savagely. "These wretches acted in obedience to your orders, and you deserve—"

"I give you my word of honour that I knew nothing whatever about the shameful means they intended to employ. The woman assured me that no coercion whatever would be necessary. But listen to the conclusion of my story. On the following day I learned what had really occurred, and I treated the wretches as they deserved."

"But you profited by their crime," said André, bitterly.

"To my shame I admit that I tried to profit by it, but my overtures were rejected with scorn and horror. This poor girl refused a fortune that would have tempted a princess, and ordered me to restore her to liberty."

"And you refused!"

"No, sir. I told her that every door was open, and that she could leave whenever she chose."

"You insinuate, then, that it was of her own free will that she spent a fortnight in the house into which you had lured her."

"She remained because she was utterly unable to leave it. The shock she had sustained, and the powerful opiate which had been administered to her, brought on brain fever in its most violent form. I spent those two weeks in a state of indescribable anxiety and alarm, I assure you. The sick girl was attended by a skilful physician, and a faithful maid-servant, and fortunately youth finally triumphed over her malady. She slowly recovered from her severe illness, and almost the first use she made of her returning strength was to leave the house. She had no difficulty in doing this, however, for I had not the slightest desire to detain her against her will."

André understood the facts at last, and his eyes filled with tears. Babiole, barely convalescent, had risked her life to save him.

"You know why she was so anxious to escape?" resumed the prince, after a brief pause. "I also know it, and admire her courageous devotion."

"What do you mean?" asked André stupefied.

"Well, I subsequently questioned that Madame Divet, wishing to learn what had become of the girl. She pretended she didn't know, but when I questioned her respecting some strange parts of the affair, she told me all about the baroness and—your father. She had his letters."

"Yes," interrupted Subligny, "I was told that. What can she have done with them? She might show them to the first comer."

"She swears that she has now burnt them. Perhaps, however, she may have returned them to the baroness, who, so I learned from the Monaco notary, signed the deed of consent to that abominable marriage without reading your name. But let that pass. After all these strange events I wanted to do something for the brave girl whom I had so greatly wronged. I thought I might offer her an indemnity—but she refused it."

"Then you have seen her again?" cried Subligny.

"Yes! I had a deal of trouble in discovering her whereabouts, but I finally ascertained her address. I called on her at her own home, or rather at the home of her uncle, who was present at our interview, and there I saw a sight I shall never forget as long as I live: the uncle, a poor devil of a collecting clerk, hesitating between a very natural desire to see his niece comfortably provided for, and a fear that the money might be regarded as the price of dishonour, and the niece proudly refusing a gift which was but a poor reward for her courage and virtue. All my efforts to overcome her objections proved unavailing, however, and I was obliged to take my money away with me. But in spite of my failure I had the satisfaction of completely reassuring the uncle, who, I think, was troubled by some suspicions that his niece's conduct had not been quite irreproachable; however, I am now obliged to believe in the existence of incorruptible virtue, and I must admit that that upsets all my previous theories."

André felt touched by the prince's language. "I am glad to have seen you, sir," he said, "and if I in my turn might ask you a favour, it would be to give me the uncle's address?"

"Certainly. I have it with me," replied the prince, opening his notebook. "Here it is: Auguste Brochard, No. 22 Rue Saint Fiacre. If you wish to find him at home, don't go until after five o'clock, as he runs about all day. But perhaps you only care to see his niece?" added the prince, with a meaning smile.

"I wish to see both of them," said André.

"Is it really true, then, that you haven't seen this charming girl since she saved you from one of the greatest misfortunes that could possibly befall a man? You certainly owe her a visit of thanks. I did my duty in coming here for the express purpose of testifying to her innocence. It is now your turn to do yours."

"I shall not fail in that, I assure you."

"I believe you, sir, and now I have only to bid you adieu, for it is not likely we shall ever meet again. I leave for Moscow on the day after tomorrow. Allow me to add that I regret having made your acquaintance at so late a day, and that I shall always hold you in the kindest remembrance." As the prince spoke he offered André his hand, and then walked towards the door. André accompanied him as far as the landing, where he met the doorkeeper bringing him a letter.

This was certainly a day of surprises, for the address was in M. Vernelle's

handwriting. André quite forgot the foreigner in his eagerness to peruse this missive, and it was with deep emotion that he tore open the envelope, and read: "My friend." These were certainly the words with which the letter began, although André could scarcely believe his eyes. "My friend, I know everything, and must ask you to forgive me for having so misjudged you. When I wrote to you, immediately after the terrible scene in the mayor's office, I could see no possible excuse for your conduct. Now, I not only freely forgive you, but thank you: for the wretched woman who has disgraced me has written to me confessing the sad truth. She swears that she knew it too late to prevent the scandal, but she now freely confesses, impelled by remorse, and I have no reason to doubt her words, the more especially, as by her direction, I have questioned a woman who was formerly her confidant and accomplice. This woman, a milliner, named Divet, has shown me proofs, and explained to me the part played in the affair by that young girl who had already saved my life. I cursed her, and now I bless her. I hesitated about revealing the terrible truth to Clémence, and yet after reflection, I preferred that she should know her mother's conduct, rather than believe that you had acted treacherously. Need I add that we love one another as much as formerly, or that with the assistance of devoted friends, I have succeeded in settling my affairs satisfactorily, and in saving from the wreck enough to begin life anew in a foreign land. Before you receive this letter I shall have left Paris with Clémence. I shall sail from Liverpool for New York, where I have business acquaintances who will help me in getting upon my feet again. We shall never forget you, and the day will perhaps come when we shall meet again, for time will assuage our present sorrow. Farewell, my dear André, think of us sometimes. We shall both pray for your happiness and success in life; and I have heartily thanked Dr. Valbrègue, who has found a new situation for you, and has so kindly interested himself in your future. I leave, however, with a deep regret that I am unable to reward the brave girl who saved my life and yours; I commend her to your care, feeling sure that you will not desert her."

André was moved to tears by the perusal of this letter. His father's conduct humiliated him. As a merchant, M. Charles Subdigny had been a model of integrity, and yet, it had been proved that he had sadly disregarded moral honesty. André, his son, wept with very grief, and the tears that dimmed his sight at first prevented him from seeing a line traced at the bottom of the page, a single line penned by a trembling hand. It ran as follows: "I forgive you. Be happy. Marry her." Clémence had not signed these words, but she had certainly written them.

André forgot his father's misconduct in thinking of the two young girls who had occupied such a prominent place in his life, and who had both suffered so deeply through him. He compared their lots in life, and was compelled to admit that Babiole was after all the more unfortunate of the two. Hope remained to Mademoiselle Vernellie. Her reputation had not suffered. She might yet love again and be loved in return. But Babiole, over whom a cloud of suspicion still hung, and who was obliged to toil for her daily bread, with no protector save an uncle, who had doubted her virtue, what had she to hope for? She had been living contentedly in her humble sphere, when out of pure kindness of heart she had involved herself in these complicated affairs which had finally placed her at a libertine's mercy. She had sacrificed herself for others, and the very persons she had saved had been the first to turn against her. Even the man she loved had secretly

suspected her, and her hasty desertion of the house where she had met him for the first time proved most conclusively that she cherished no hope of ever seeing him again. But justice had been done her at last, for Dr. Valbrègue, M. Vernelle, and Clémence, seemed to have united in urging André to atone for the wrong he had done her. The prince, too, had given him similar advice while rendering a glowing tribute to Babiole's virtues. Remembering all this, André hesitated no longer. Marbeuf would soon call for him, no doubt, but he did not care to consult his friend, who was somewhat prejudiced against Babiole, and who would undoubtedly attempt to dissuade him from his purpose. To reach the Rue Saint Fiacre from the Rue Rougemont, one only has to cross the boulevard, and in a few minutes André had reached the house which the prince had designated.

"Does Monsieur Brochard live here?" he inquired.

"On the fifth floor—the first door to the left."

After this brief conversation with the doorkeeper, André flew upstairs three steps at a time, so that when he reached the floor mentioned it was not emotion alone that quickened the throbbings of his heart. He paused for a moment to take breath, and then rang.

It was Babiole who opened the door—Babiole in a simple home dress, and looking more beautiful than ever in a snowy apron and woollen *fichu*. She turned pale on seeing Subigny, but tried her best to receive him as a stranger, although her eyes contradicted her manner. André had no difficulty in reading forgiveness in them. "What do you wish, and who told you that I resided here?" she asked, with affected coldness.

"Prince Lipetsk," replied Subigny, promptly. "He has just left me having called for the express purpose of telling me all about your mysterious disappearance. I know now, that you are a saint and a martyr."

"I am neither the one nor the other, sir. I haven't the slightest pretensions to sanctity, and as for martyrdom, I have suffered a good deal, if it is true, but I find myself very comfortable now."

This was said almost gaily, and Babiole, as she spoke, opened the door a little wider, so that André managed to enter the ante-room. "I warn you that I am at my uncle's," she said, "and that he may return at any moment."

"That is exactly what I desire. I hope you will allow me to wait for him. I have a favour to ask of him."

"You had better not. He is not very kindly disposed towards you."

"I shall be content if he doesn't refuse me a hearing."

"Then you merely came to have a talk with my uncle," said Babiole smilingly. "Be content, sir, he is coming upstairs. I recognise his step."

André listened and heard the stairs creak under a heavy tread.

The abode in which Babiole had taken refuge consisted of four rooms much smaller than those of the lodging in the Rue Lamartine, but quite as neatly kept. There was no carpet, but the tiled floor was beautifully clean and two rather gaudy lithographs, representing the taking of the Smala and the charge of the cuirassiers at Reichshoffen, adorned the walls. Uncle Auguste had served in the cavalry, and his rooms showed it. André who had only seen him once in the hospital, scarcely knew him when he entered the rooms, but the collector recognised Subigny at a glance, and indulged in an energetic oath by way of expressing the surprise he experienced at finding him with Babiole. "What are you doing here?" he asked, almost savagely. "And you, Babiole, why did you admit this gentleman?"

"Because he told me that he wished to speak with you," promptly replied Babiole, who wanted to compel André to disclose the object of his visit. "Me!" exclaimed the uncle. "Nonsense! it is you he came to see, and it seems to me that I arrived just in time to prevent him from telling you a parcel of falsehoods."

"You are mistaken, sir," replied André, endeavouring to remain calm. "I spoke the truth. It is really you that I have to deal with, as you are the uncle of Mademoiselle Elizabeth Babois, I believe."

"Her uncle and guardian. Well, what of it?"

"Then it is to you I must apply, in order to obtain her hand."

Babiole turned as white as a sheet, but Uncle Auguste flushed with anger, and exclaimed: "Her hand! Do you mean that you ask for my niece in marriage?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, so you want to make merry at our expense! Understand, once for all, that this is a subject upon which I won't tolerate any jesting."

"You certainly cannot suspect me of jesting at this—one of the most solemn moments of my life."

"You are really going too far! Do you think you will make me believe that your intentions are honourable—that you, a gentleman, would marry my niece, who is only a poor work girl! And after all that has passed—Well, you have plenty of audacity, I must say."

"I see, sir, that you don't know why my marriage with Mademoiselle Vernelle was broken off, at the last moment."

"On the contrary, I know perfectly well all about it. My niece has told me everything."

At this point a happy thought struck André. Drawing M. Vernelle's letter from his pocket, he handed it to the uncle, saying: "Will you have the kindness to read this?"

The uncle took the note, rather reluctantly, and began by glancing at the signature. "It is from your employer," he growled. "I have no desire to know anything about your affairs with him."

"Pray read it. There is an allusion to mademoiselle in the letter."

Babiole started and looked anxiously at André. She could not imagine what M. Vernelle could have had to say about her. Her uncle decided to read the letter, however, and when his perusal was over, he said rather more affably: "Monsieur Vernelle is a very worthy man. I always thought so, and now I know it, so I am pleased to learn that he does my niece justice. But this doesn't explain the desire to marry her which has so suddenly seized hold of you. If it is merely to please your former employer, my niece doesn't want a husband who would marry her out of obedience sake."

"I love her," replied André, looking straight at Babiole, whose eyes drooped.

"Wait a bit, here is a line at the bottom, written in a different hand," remarked the uncle.

"That of Mademoiselle Clémence Vernelle."

"And she, also, advises you to marry my niece. They both seem to favour the match."

"Because they know that the marriage would insure my happiness, but if the idea is distasteful to Mademoiselle Babois—"

"Oh, no," said Babiole, naïvely.

"What! so you must needs have a finger in the pie!" exclaimed Uncle

Auguste. "Why, you sly puss, it was only yesterday that you announced your firm determination to become an old maid."

"Because I had no idea that Monsieur Subligny was thinking of me."

"Then if *he* didn't marry you, you would not marry at all?"

"No, uncle."

"But I hope you don't intend to marry him without my consent."

"No, uncle, for I am very sure that you will grant it."

"That depends. In the first place, I fear you would make a great mistake in marrying this gentleman. You are only a poor work girl, and he has been brought up differently."

"My grandfather was a sailor," interposed André, quickly. "My father made a fortune, after beginning life as an office-boy in the house of a shipping-merchant, but he died ruined."

"Then you haven't a penny, and you have just lost your situation, as old Vernelle has gone to the dogs! My niece is no better off, and I have nothing whatever to leave her at my death. What will you live upon?"

"Upon our earnings," replied Babiole, cheerfully.

"You think so, do you?"

"I have, at least, managed to earn a very comfortable living, so far, uncle."

"Because you have only had yourself to look out for."

"My husband will be able to provide for himself."

"A lucrative position has just been offered me," interposed André.

"Where, in Paris?"

"No, in Havre. I am indebted for it to Dr. Valbrègue, and I should have entered upon my new duties before now, but for my anxiety to see Mademoiselle Babois before my departure."

"Valbrègue, the physician at the Necker Hospital?"

"Yes, sir, and he also favours this marriage. He appreciates your niece's worth, and knows how deeply we are all indebted to her."

"I know what she did for you, but how about the others?"

"Didn't she discover my unfortunate friend at the hospital?"

"Oh, yes, Number Nineteen. What has become of that fellow?"

"He has obtained an excellent situation in a mercantile house, thanks to the doctor."

"So he had no crime upon his conscience, after all?"

"He is the most honest man of my acquaintance. A scoundrel robbed him, after trying to kill him—a scoundrel named Chantepie."

"The villain who reduced my brother-in-law to poverty years ago?"

"The same, sir; Mademoiselle Babiole told me so on the day I saw her for the first time, and warned me against him. I wish that I had listened to her advice."

"He has been arrested, I hope?"

"No, for Dr. Valbrègue, after extorting from him a full confession of his guilt, promised not to denounce him."

"Valbrègue was too generous."

"He dreaded the scandal that might ensue. Besides, Chantepie has left Paris for good."

"He had better not return, for if I ever chanced to meet him, he would have a very uncomfortable time of it, I assure you. But we are wasting time in talking of this scoundrel. You really seem anxious to marry my niece, and I judge from appearances that she's willing to become your wife; but perhaps you are not aware of the contemptible trick that old hussy Madame Divet played on her?"

"I know everything, sir. I have seen the prince, and he paid a most eloquent tribute to Mademoiselle Babiole's virtue. He came to see me for the express purpose of confessing the whole truth."

"And he came here to offer my niece an indemnity."

"Which she refused?"

"Of course. It wouldn't have looked right—although Babiole hasn't anything to reproach herself with."

Babiole had listened to this conversation without speaking by word of mouth; but her eyes were sufficiently expressive, and in them André read the artless joy she made no attempt to conceal.

Babiole was no coquette, so she feigned neither embarrassment nor astonishment, as a fashionable young lady would have done; and now she ventured to express her feelings with a frankness which some of her superiors in rank might have considered most unseemly. "Monsieur André," she said, unblushingly, "I believe that you love me, and I myself have loved you for a long time. I believe, indeed, that I have loved you ever since the first day I met you, and I should be ready to marry you now if it wasn't too soon to talk of such a thing. The municipal offices in the Rue Drouot would bring me bad luck."

"Mademoiselle Vernelle left this morning for America," said André, with all the eagerness of a lover who has forgotten the past in the happiness of the present.

"And if it's a question of the mayor's office," growled Uncle Auguste, "why, we are not in the Rue Drouot district here. Our office is in the Rue de la Banque."

"Then I consent," cried Babiole, laughing. "You ask my hand in marriage, Monsieur André, as if I were a noble young lady, instead of saying bluntly: 'When shall the wedding be?' Ah, well, here's my hand."

André knelt to kiss the slender white hand extended to him; its fingers still bore the marks of the needle, but it was an honest, helpful hand, worth far more than that of many a fine lady. Meanwhile, Uncle Auguste wept for joy.

They are married. Eight months of quiet happiness have effaced the remembrance of past misfortunes. Babiole lives at Havre with her husband. André's mother fairly worships her new daughter; and Uncle Auguste is employed in the same establishment as his nephew by marriage, who will become a member of the firm at no very distant day. Chantepie has been obliged to fly to England on account of some new act of rascality, and Madame Divet has had a severe paralytic stroke. Bertaud recently died of indigestion, after supping with some worthless creature; and the so-called Baroness d'Orbec is on the verge of ruin. However, Dr. Valbrègue has a splendid practice; M. Vernelle is prospering at New York, and his daughter will no doubt marry to her liking. The reward of the righteous comes, sometimes, in this world as well as in the next.

THE MAN WITH THE WAXEN HANDS.

I.

"YES, decidedly!" said the Marquis, looking courageously at the mocking circle that surrounded him. There were there two young men, bald and decorated, several sceptical old men, a member of the Institute, who passes for the grandson of Voltaire, some incredulous dowagers, and some young women who were too fond of balls to believe in anything else, without counting the witty Countess de Rigny and the charming Mademoiselle Louise de Rigny, her daughter. "Yes," said the Marquis, "I believe in magnetism, sorcerers, necromancers, magic, spiritism, chiromancy, phrenology, vampirism, the evil eye, in everything which is supernatural, astonishing, inexplicable, improbable, impossible, and I believe in it firmly, frankly, and blindly. Saint Thomas is not my ancestor, thank God, and if I have declared war, implacable war, against any enemy, it is against doubt. In truth, I am so credulous, that I find the reasoning of man who maintained that Adam had existed, because he had his portrait in his cabinet, perfectly logical."

The Marquis Ange-Gontran de Rouvre was thirty-five years of age. He might pass, without question, for a handsome man, in spite of his red hair and a slight obliquity of vision, which seemed sometimes to direct his eyes towards the contemplation of the infinite. Gontran had a pale complexion, fine features, a woman's hands and feet, a slender waist, a fine name and a princely fortune. He enjoyed at the same time the reputation of being witty and eccentric. All these qualities were blended together, so as to form a veritable hero of romance. Bear in mind that Gontran had been twice round the world for his own amusement, and that his reputation of traveller added still further to his personal advantages. One thing only spoilt all this: the Marquis, whose father had died in a dramatic manner, killed in a duel as some said, by suicide according to other accounts, had long and strange fits of melancholy. His blue eye then became of a profound green colour, and fixed itself upon an invisible point, lost in space. Gontran remained thus absorbed for hours together. You might have compared him to a Hindoo fakir, anchylosed in the contemplation of his navel. But this defect was known to his friends alone, and Gontran was renowned in society as one of the most brilliant, most witty and most charming of men.

After his profession of faith, the Marquis looked around him as if to seek a champion—an adverse champion. He found none, and continued:

"Superstition is my element. I was born on a Friday, on the thirteenth of March. It is a fatality : every artless belief finds its echo in me, and that which consoles me is, that after successive observations I have come to the conclusion that the strong minds are really the weak ones. I firmly believe that there are unlucky days and lucky days, and I mark them gladly as people marked them of old at Rome, and as people now mark them at Madagascar. For all the gold in the world I would not put a shoe or stocking on my right foot first, and I never laugh on Friday for fear of weeping on Sunday."

At that moment one of the two bald young men, M. Arthur de Langeterre, leaned towards Mademoiselle Louise de Rigny, and said in her ear :

"Your Fridays will not be particularly gay when you become Marquise de Rouvre."

Louise shook her head and smiled in sign of doubt, which meant to say that there is many a slip between the cup and the lip, and that, although the betrothed of M. de Rouvre, she was not yet his wife.

"At any rate," interrupted the member of the Institute, "you do not believe in vampires ; science only sees pathological cases where you see miracles. It would be easy for me—"

"To convince me ?" said the Marquis. "No, without presumption, not at all. I am tenacious in my opinions. You speak of vampires ? You deny that vampires exist ? I have seen some ?"

"Nonsense."

"I have seen some too," said M. Arthur de Langeterre, smiling gracefully ; "I have seen some at the Ambigu in a piece by Antony Béraud, or some one else. It was an English clown, who was got up in a terrific and fantastic fashion. I can see him still with his white face, enveloped in a blood-stained shroud. Pray, did your vampire in any way resemble that one, Marquis ?"

"Not at all," said Gontran. "My vampire was dressed as you and I are ; he spoke French as you write it, sir (the member of the Institute bowed), and he was really a charming man. But why should I not tell you the whole story ?"

There was a profound silence, and the Marquis, after having passed his hand over his pale brow, proceeded with his narrative, to which a slight trembling in his voice lent a great charm—the charm of dread :

"I was travelling on the banks of the Danube, two years ago. I was by myself. A companion is sometimes embarrassing ; for adventure it is better to be alone. Whenever I could leave my guide at the hotel, I did so willingly, and went off on foot, without any other companion than my thoughts, for days together. I used to sketch, observe, write, think. The Morlaque language was tolerably familiar to me ; I liked to talk with the peasants whom I met. These good people do not look upon a stranger as an enemy ; I knew, too, always how to secure a welcome ; I always carried with me a gourd full of good liquor and some amulets against witchcraft. I made presents of my amulets and liquor, and in exchange I would ask to have some story told me, and I never had to press for this.

It was thus I had been received, with open heart, by Viecz Baglanovich, a rich farmer, loyal, jovial, a free laugh and a free drinker, who used to sing songs, moistened by frequent libations, and who would say to me, pointing to his daughter Helen :

"She is the pearl and rose of Presteg. It is because she has a fresh face

and blooming health that I can say to you with a gay heart : ' My little father, here is a pleasant journey to you ! ' "

Helen was indeed pretty, but as I am neither a painter nor a novelist, I shall not attempt to paint her portrait. I remained two or three days with Viecz Baglanovich. At the end of that time the rain was falling.

" We shall have it wet for a long time, now," said my host, " and you cannot resume your journey during such weather."

The country was, in fact, nothing but a vast marsh ; the flooded river spread its yellow waters like a muddy lake ; and in the plain, furrowed with streams that grew larger each day, the trees stretched their meagre branches sadly against a low, damp, and gray sky. I thanked Baglanovich, and told him that I would remain until the return of the sunbeams.

" May the sunbeams never return then," said my host, gaily, " and may this infernal weather continue for long months."

That very evening, as we were at table, there came a sharp knock at the door. Who could it be ? who could be scouring the roads at such an hour in such weather ? Everybody in the village was shut up in his house ; you could hear the wind wailing, and the willows waving their dishevelled branches. Baglanovich rose and opened the door, and there entered a man dressed in the French fashion, wrapped up in a large black mantle, which was all wet and dripping over his travelling boots.

" Will you not grant me hospitality ? " he said, in a metallic voice which made me shudder. " I will pay for it loyally."

" Come in," said Viecz Baglanovich, " drink, eat, and rest yourself. Sleep under my roof as if you were under your own ; you are at home. But, by Saint-Hyacinthe," he added, " a man must be the devil himself to put foot out of doors in such a deluge."

The stranger approached the fire and held his feet and hands to the flame. He was pale, with long black hair, an aquiline nose, a sharp profile, thin lips ; but what struck me most in him were his hands—long, thin, delicate, almost always motionless, and white and transparent as wax.

He said nothing. I went up to him and asked if he was French.

" Yes," he replied.

He added some commonplace details about his life, but I learnt nothing in particular. It seemed as if he wished to hide something from me, and it would have been unbecoming to insist. I left him to his reverie, but as I looked at him I felt a kind of instinctive dread. I turned round and saw Helen with her eyes dilated and fixed upon the stranger. At that moment Baglanovich rose.

" You must need rest," he said to his new guest. " Come ! "

The stranger rose, saluted me politely, and fixing his glance upon Helen left the room. I saw that she grew pale ; she went and huddled herself up in a corner and I heard her weeping.

The stranger remained ten days in the house of Viecz Baglanovich, and from day to day Helen became paler and paler, and seemed to be slowly wasting away, while her hands resembled the bloodless hands of the stranger. In short, one morning she was found dead in her bed.

Wild with grief, the father threw himself into my arms, wishing he were dead and cursing heaven in the same breath.

" No ! no ! " I said to him, " Viecz Baglanovich, do not die. Before you go to join Helen, think that you have to avenge her."

"Avenge her!" he exclaimed with the roar of a lion.

"Do you not see," I continued, "that she has been killed by a vampire?"

The old Morlaque bounded like a jackal and sprang to his arms, which were hanging up over the chimney. "Yes," he said "the stranger! the stranger!" And he rushed to the chamber of the man with the waxen hands.

The stranger was not to be found. Viecz Baglanovich ran all over the village crying out for the murderer of his child. A beggar-man, a player on the *guzla*, had seen the stranger on that very morning hieing away towards *Vorgraz*. Viecz Baglanovich saddled his horse. He arrived at *Vorgraz* the same evening. The stranger had just left the village. They showed Viecz Baglanovich the road that he had taken. Viecz Baglanovich caught him up between *Vorgraz* and *Kasno*. He seized him by the throat and plunged his poniard into his neck. The next day Viecz was at *Prestag*, and was present at the funeral of his daughter. In the evening we were sitting alone before the empty hearth. The wind was whistling outside and the rain falling.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. It was I who opened it this time, and I drew back terrified. Upon my honour we then saw the man with the waxen hands enter, pale, stiff as a corpse, with a gaping wound in his throat, but a smile on his lips, a calm and mocking smile. He said nothing but went straight up to Viecz Baglanovich, who watched him with a wild look, while he showed him his fresh wound, after which he went out. Then Baglanovich uttered a cry of rage and rushed after him, but he saw nothing in the profound darkness.

"To-morrow," he said, as he came in, "I will go along the *Kasno* road and demand the body. I had forgotten that; I will drive a stake through its heart. The vampire then will not return."

"But," interrupted *Madame de Rigny*, "your story is horrifying, *Marquis*, and I really do not know whether I ought to allow you to continue it. Have pity on our sleep." On the other hand, the blonde and sentimental *Mademoiselle de Rigny* anxiously urged the continuation of the story.

"I have finished," said the *Marquis*. "The body of the stranger had been found on the road by some shepherds and carried to a neighbouring farm. It was thither that Viecz Baglanovich was taken.

"It is the body of a vampire!" said the father. "He has killed my daughter."

He took a stake, sharpened like a lance, and plunged it into the breast of the corpse. The vampire then opened his eyes; a flood of blood spurted from his mouth, and Baglanovich turned towards the kneeling shepherd:

"My children, this one is smitten with impotence. God wishes us to pray for the hangman and for his victim. Pray for *Helen* and pray for him."

II.

JUST when *Gontran de Rouvre* was finishing his story by adding that Viecz Baglanovich died of grief, the door of the salon was opened and the servant announced *M. Victor de Bermont*. A tall young man was seen to enter, pale, and dressed all in black, and as *Mademoiselle de Rigny* went

forward to greet the new comer, Gontran uttered a cry and became as pale as a corpse. M. de Bermont looked at him with astonishment, and then saluted him politely.

At this moment dinner was announced. Gontran hastened to Madame de Rigny and inquired in a trembling voice, "Do you know that man?"

"Yes. I am his godmother."

"Ah! I must be crazy!" said Gontran. "Do you know whom I thought I recognised in him?"

"No."

"Who?" asked Louise, advancing.

"The man with the waxen hands!" replied the Marquis.

The company passed into the dining-room, where a most magnificent dinner was served. M. Victor de Bermont had taken Madame de Rigny's arm. At table he sat directly opposite M. de Rouvre and Louise. Gontran could not keep his eyes off M. de Bermont.

"How is it," he asked Louise, "that I have never before seen M. de Bermont at your mother's house?"

"He was in Germany when you were presented to us; he has only arrived in Paris within the last few days."

Gontran did not say another word. There was but little conversation at the commencement of the repast. M. de Bermont seemed to be absorbed in some silent contemplation, and Gontran kept watching him with singular earnestness. In truth the former had something strange about him. Thin and pale, his face was framed with long black wavy hair, his straight nose curled over a thin mouth, devoid of moustaches. A sort of nervous tic contracted his white face from time to time, and his sharp, pearly teeth convulsively bit his under lip on which there was generally a drop of blood.

"It is he! it is he!" thought M. de Rouvre, as he kept examining him, and his eyes rested on M. de Bermont's hands. They were white, delicate and graceful as the hands of a woman. Gontran thought that he was dreaming. M. de Bermont had not only an astonishing resemblance to the vampire of Prestag; but this decisive peculiarity of dead hands. Assuredly the vampire and he were one, consequently M. de Bermont must be the stranger whom Viecz Baglanovich had killed. There could be no doubt about it.

Madame de Rigny was talking to M. de Bermont. Gontran felt himself start as he heard the metallic ring of his voice. He shuddered and fixed his eyes suddenly dilated with a sort of ecstatic expression of hate on M. de Bermont. He felt himself seized by a sudden fit of wrath, and only controlled himself by a violent effort. After passing his hand across his brow several times as if to drive away some thought, he took part in the conversation which had now become general.

The talk at that moment turned upon travels, adventures; upon the Chinese and then upon the Aztecs. M. de Rouvre seized the opportunity to allude to the Danube so as to embarrass M. de Bermont, the vampire of Prestag. After having spoken of the marshes and willows of the country, the guzla players the shepherds and so forth, he turned towards M. de Bermont and asked him somewhat abruptly:

"But if I am not mistaken I have had the pleasure of meeting you in those parts?"

M. de Bermont smiled and replied that the Marquis was mistaken, that his travels had been bounded by the Alps and the Pyrenees; that he had been along the banks of the Rhine, and that once he had passed through

London, though so hurriedly that he had not time to see the Crown jewels at the Tower.

Gontran could hardly restrain himself. The self-possession of M. de Bermont was too much for him. He did not doubt for a moment but that he was the man whom he had already met. Everything proved it, and, above all, the white, corpse-like hands. He soon remarked that M. de Bermont's glance became fixed upon Mademoiselle de Rigny, who seemed to be fascinated by it, and never removed her eyes from the pale face of the young man, whom Gontran observed to smile with an air of wicked triumph. The Marquis felt himself seized with a veritable vertigo. It seemed to him that he was no longer in the Countess's house, but in some fantastic world. This nightmare of a waking man became soon so unbearable and so terrible that he rose, left the dining-room and threw himself into the first arm-chair that he found, closing his eyes and burying his face in his hands. It appeared to him as if his brain were in a turmoil.

"Oh ! that man," he said, "I hate him ! But who is he ? The godson of Madame de Rigny ? They never spoke to me about him before - Ah ! No ! a thousand times no ; he is the murderer of Helen ; Viccz Baglanovich would certainly recognise him !"

And he thought that M. de Bermont had looked at Mademoiselle de Rigny as he had formerly looked at Helen. This thought made the blood mount to his heart, and he returned to the dining-room.

At this moment, by a singular contrast, the face of M. de Bermont appeared to him singularly peaceful and prepossessing. The pale young man was absorbed in the dissection of the wing of a partridge, and did not so much as deign to look at his enemy ; and Mademoiselle de Rigny never removed her eyes from the young man. The Marquis noticed this, and his wrath returned. He further noticed that M. de Bermont affected to refuse certain dishes which were reputed excellent, while he devoured meats with blood in them, and ate enormously. This appetite, which was, by the way, quite natural, seemed to Gontran a savage voracity. A man with such white hands, who looked at Louise so fixedly, and eat so greedily could be nothing but a vampire.

M. de Rouvre returned to his home thoroughly persuaded that providence, in placing him face to face with the vampire of Prestag, had assigned him an important rôle : that of delivering the De Rigny family from such a monster. How could he succeed in his task ? He would reflect, but he would certainly soon act, and would show himself perfectly implacable.

Gontran passed a very agitated night. All the superstitions of his youth, all the ghost stories that he had read in his early years, all his unwholesome studies in alchemy, necromancy, and magnetism combined to procure him the most dreadful visions and the most horrible dreams. In the morning he was worn out and haggard. He rose almost with pain and hurried off to the Countess, and told her frankly and clearly what he thought of M. de Bermont.

"Nonsense !" said Madame de Rigny, "you are joking, Marquis. Besides, I see through your game, you are jealous."

"I, jealous ?"

"Yes, of M. de Bermont. You know that he has asked Louise's hand, and you find it an easy way to get rid of a rival to treat him as a vampire."

She was laughing. Gontran became pale, and said to her, in an agitated voice :

"I beseech you, madame, forbid M. de Bermont your house. Whether it be superstition or folly, I nevertheless feel that that man brings misfortune with him. He is not the stranger of Prestag—I will admit that; but he is the evil-eye, the jettatore of Paris. It is not he who killed Helen, but it is he who will kill Louise!"

"Indeed, Marquis," said the Countess, becoming pale in turn, "think what you are saying. Such a supposition is absurd, it is a calumny, M. de Rouvre—"

"Say that it's cowardice!" cried the Marquis. "But I love Louise. Is she not already engaged to me? Oh! I will save her, and save her, perhaps in spite of you! As for M. de Bermont, if necessary, I will kill him!"

"All this proves that you are really mad," said the Countess. "What warlike mood is this that has come over you? Do you not know," she added, laughingly, "that vampires cannot be killed?"

"Yes, they can," replied the Marquis, coldly; "if you tear out the hearts, burn them, and scatter the dust to the four winds."

The Countess shuddered, drew back involuntarily, and looked with terror at this man, dressed in the latest and most elegant fashion, who played with his stick and talked of killing a man, simply because he suspected him of vampirism. This fanatic in patent leather boots was really terrible; his wild eye, his clenched teeth, his purple lips, would have alarmed a less courageous woman than Madame de Rigny. The latter briefly related her knowledge of Victor de Bermont. He was the most affable and gentlemanly man in the world, a little cold, enthusiastic enough to love, and selfish enough to be loved, witty without aiming at wit, and the possessor of a fortune which his economical habits, however, made sufficient. He lived in retirement; he was an enemy of society, but not of men; capable of the greatest devotion, but incapable of the slightest caprice.

Gontran withdrew, unconvinced. He saw only one thing in all this, namely, that the Countess thought of giving her daughter to M. de Bermont. This enraged him more than ever. That very evening he learned that M. de Bermont lived in the Rue Rodier, as the door-porter said, a strangely furnished suite of rooms; that he came home regularly at midnight and never went out before noon: and, finally, that he had a German servant named Gerder. All these circumstances seemed exceedingly romantic to the Marquis de Rouvre. In the first place, what a strange idea it was to go and live in the Rue Rodier. The district is almost deserted, and the street narrow. One must be terribly in love with solitude to live in such a place. Then that regularity of conduct, those fixed habits, that life of discipline, was not all this proof that M. de Bermont was concealing some terrible secret? From that moment Gontran's brain was like a furnace. He conceived a thousand wild projects; he had, like a celebrated publicist, at least one idea a day for getting rid of the man whose presence annoyed him. He first of all thought of provoking him to a duel, but this was too vulgar a way of killing a vampire.

The Marquis's visits to the Hotel de Rigny became rarer. He remarked that the Countess received him with a sort of coldness. When he spoke of marriage one day, Madame de Rigny made an evasive answer. He insisted and asked her to fix a date. Madame de Rigny replied that Louise was very unwell.

"Of course she is!" said the Marquis, his eyes flashing fire. "It is this wretch! it is he!"

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked the Countess.

"I will kill him," said M. de Rouvre, without replying, and he left Madame de Rigny entirely convinced of his madness.

Gontran returned to his home in a high state of excitement. Instinctively he glanced at a trophy of arms that adorned the wall of his apartment. Suddenly he seized a little Spanish poniard, detached it from the wall, and examined it carefully. The poniard came from Toledo, and belonged to the sixteenth century. On the hilt, in the form of a cross, was the cipher of the Virgin Mary, and on the blade an unknown artist had engraved a pious inscription :

Por rey, por patria,
Por Jesus, por Maria.

"This weapon is blessed!" said Gontran. "I will strike the blow with it!"

The next day he rang at Victor's door. The servant opened it, he was alone.

"How much money must I give you to let me in here to-morrow, after midnight?" Gontran demanded of him.

The man looked at the Marquis with an astonished air. Gontran repeated his question.

"But who are you?" Gerder asked.

"I am the Marquis de Rouvre. I am neither a rogue, nor a thief. All I want is to cut off a lock of your master's hair while he is asleep. It is a bet that I have made; do you understand?"

"Oh! if it is a bet!" said Gerder, holding out his hand in which the Marquis placed several gold pieces.

M. de Rouvre returned the same night. Gerder came and opened the door softly. "Is it you, *mein herr*?" he asked. He felt a few more louis slip into his hand. "Ah! it is you then. Come this way," he added. And he conducted Gontran across a vast room into an alcove lighted by a night-lamp. "There he is!" he said, pointing to his sleeping master.

M. de Bermont was pallid, and slept with his eyes half open. His white hands were suspended from the ceiling by loops of velvet, and his hair was enclosed in a red-coloured cap. The lamp shed a sinister light over his thin face.

"Well!" said Gerder, as he saw Gontran look fixedly at the sleeper. "Cut off the hair, quickly!"

Gontran felt a cold sweat over his whole body; his hair stood on end, he shuddered, drew back, advanced, drew back again.

"Make haste!" said Gerder. "If he were to awaken—!"

"He will not awaken," replied Gontran.

Gerder saw the Marquis lean over M. de Bermont; he heard a terrible cry, and the Marquis, pale and agitated, rose up and gained the door walking backwards.

M. de Bermont was still in his bed, pale and inanimate. Only his eyes were open, and the light shone on the hilt of the poniard that had transfixed his heart. Gerder thought it prudent to inform the police of what had taken place. The commissary hastened to the house.

"My master," said the German, "was a man of regular habits, who lived scrupulously and gauged his appetite and his wants strictly. He used to sleep with his arms suspended above him, in order to have white hands. He had no enemies; I do not know why that man murdered him,"

The Marquis de Rouvre was arrested just at the moment when he was about to blow out his own brains. The Marquis was not even tried. In accordance with the reports of the doctors, he was taken to the asylum of Dr. B., where he now is. He is the calmest and gentlest of the inmates of that establishment. His frenzy has calmed down; he thinks now that he is the husband of the fairy Urgell, and he passes his time rhyming ballads in her honour.

Mademoiselle de Rigny has consoled herself by marrying M. de Langeterre, one of those bald young men who had listened to the story told by Gontran de Rouvre with benevolent but incredulous smiles.

THE END.

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"We wonder how the vexed spirit of him who kept a private record of human absurdities would enjoy the new translation of 'Sallambô' by M. F. Sheldon? "The soldier whom he had commanded in Sicily had been accorced by the Grand Council a great feast," &c.—there is an example (from the first page) in which style has hardly been restored by the translator. Again, 'silver cymbals, hitting her cheeks, pendant from her ears' that is scarcely the kind of English that Flaubert's French deserves for a change of raiment. Or look at this: 'The inspired terrors, more than the walls, defend such sanctuaries.' 'The water gradually rose till it almost reached the superior stones.' 'She resaw him in the tent.' The translation is full of these flowers of style."—*Daily News*.

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"Perhaps we have shown, from the evidence of the first few pages, that, whatever Mr. Sheldon has done to 'Sallambô,' at all events he has not 'Englished' it. Neither his style nor his words are English. . . . For example, in the second line he says that a feast 'had been accorced by the Grand Council' to the soldiers. Flaubert writes, 'Les soldats se donnaient un grand festin.' When Mr. Sheldon adds that the park 'environed a court,' he is apparently writing American. There is no excuse for the expression in French. When Mr. Sheldon says ludicrously that the fires in the garden 'imparted to the vicinity the appearance of a battlefield upon which the dead were being burned,' he is Englishing 'et l'on voyait au milieu du jardin, comme sur un champ de bataille quand on brûle les morts,' and so forth. His 'English' about 'imparting to the vicinity' would shock the humblest penny-a-liner.

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